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FRONT-LINE MANAGERS' STRATEGIZING
A CASE STUDY OF A HIGH STREET OPTICAL RETAILER

PhD Thesis

The Open University Business School

31 March 2015

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Abstract

The present study investigates how Front-Line Managers (FLMs) accomplish strategizing practice and praxes in their day-to-day work at a high street optical retailer (Optica). Despite increasing research on strategizing work, we are still ill-informed about the phenomenon at the lower, non-senior management level. Data was collected over 12 months by interviewing 24 FLMs and four middle managers; by observing FLMs in their stores and during five regional monthly meetings; and by collecting internal documents and external industry reports covering seven years. The data was analysed using thematic coding whereby both the agent's context analysis and conduct analysis methodological bracketing techniques were mobilised.

Findings from the present research reveal that FLMs strategize by carrying out strategy-realising work in the form of localising practices and praxes. The organisation's strategy constrains the localising work of FLMs, while their professional experience enables it. The organisation's strategy is drawn up and enacted in the day-to-day work of FLMs when they are localising.

The present study claims four main theoretical contributions to the SaP literature. Firstly, it advances strategizing as strategy-realising work by defining strategizing as a *social strategy-realising praxis that transposes the abstract strategy statement into the concrete conduct*. Secondly, it elaborates on a notion of strategy as a combination of external and internal social structure explaining strategy heterogeneity. Thirdly, this research extends current SaP literature by discussing the role of structural context in the tension between normativity and creativity. Fourthly, it advances a framework illustrating strategy-realising as a structuration process, composed of multiple and overlapping structuration cycles. The framework illustrates how structural context and strategic agency co-depend and co-emerge in strategizing practices and praxis. Methodological contributions are made in two ways. First, the present study offers a critical assessment of employing Strong Structuration Theory to conduct empirical SaP studies. Second, it elaborates a data analysis model that combines abductive logic with the agent's context analysis and conduct analysis methodological bracketing techniques.

List of abbreviations

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
FLM	Front-Line Manager
HO	Head Office
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
MM	Middle Manager
MOS	Management and Organisation Studies
MRM	Monthly Regional Meeting
OD	Operations Director
SaP	Strategy as Practice
SST	Strong Structuration Theory
ToS	Theory of Structuration

Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the topic

Curiosity about what strategy is at the organisational peripheries and how front-line managers strategize stimulates the present research (Mintzberg, 1987; Whittington, 2006). In its early days, the young field of strategic management began with an assumption that strategy work is exclusive to the upper echelons in organisations (Ansoff, 1965; Chandler, 1962; Drucker, 1954). Later, scholars examined the process of strategy-making (Burgelman, 1983; Jarzabkowski and Balogun, 2009; Mintzberg and Waters, 1985; Pettigrew, 1977); questioned the social nature of the concept itself (Knights and Morgan, 1991; Whittington, 2012); looked into the role of middle managers (Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992; Guth and Macmillan, 1986; Mantere, 2008) and strategy consultants (Sturdy et al., 2006) in strategizing; and, more recently, sought to understand how certain artefacts influence strategizing (Dameron et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Kaplan, 2011). Despite this increasing scholarly interest in what managers actually do (Barley and Kunda, 2001; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007), researchers are yet to grasp how Front-Line Managers (FLMs) engage with the organisation's strategy in their day-to-day work.

The question then arises: why take an interest in FLMs' strategizing work? A fast-changing competitive environment has been forcing organisations to adopt a flatter structure, thereby pushing some of the strategizing work to the organisational peripheries (Ahrens and Chapman, 2007; Stensaker and Falkenberg, 2007). The same environmental factors have also changed the nature of strategizing work from an occasional planning event to a continuously

evolving social practice (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1997). In parallel, we are witnessing an increasing number of store-based retail organisations, characterised with a small head office and a large number of outlets where customer encounters are managed (Garvin and Levesque, 2008). The contemporary high street is flooded with these multi-unit organisations: banks, restaurant chains, newsagents, brokers, letting agencies, and so forth. These outlets spread over a large geographical area, and their managers are rarely in the head office where strategy-setting activities are supposed to be taking place (Chang, 2002). Yet, these FLMs are responsible for enacting the organisation's strategy in their stores, while managing their staff and encountering customers in their various locales (Chang and Harrington Jr., 2002; MacNeil, 2003). Hence, investigating how FLMs strategize is more urgent than it has ever been.

The present research began originally with an aim to understand how Front-Line Managers accomplish strategizing practices in their day-to-day work. A theoretical quest was later developed, and the presented study addressed how the interrelation between structure and agency unfolds at the individual level during strategizing practices and praxis. Using SST as a framing devise, the present research developed and answered four research questions, these are:

- What are the main external structures drawn upon by FLMs when strategizing?
- What are the main internal structures drawn upon by FLMs when strategizing?
- How does FLMs' strategic agency manifest in FLMs' day-to-day conduct?
- What are the main position-practice relations within which FLMs operate?

The present research relies on tenets set by the practice movement within the strategic management field, known as Strategy as Practice (SaP). This stream of research invites empirical studies into the day-to-day strategizing work of managers (Whittington, 2006). It has shed important light on strategizing practices of different types of strategy actors within and outside organisations, and examined the social nature of strategizing (Vaara and Whittington, 2012). However, SaP research has paid scarce attention, if any, to FLMS' strategizing work thus far.

Several theoretical lenses are available to study the practices of managers as an 'interaction' between structure and agency, such as activity theory (Engeström, 1987; Jarzabkowski, 2010), the Bourdieusian tradition (Bourdieu, 1977; Gomez, 2010), and the Foucauldian perspective (Allard-Poesi, 2010; Foucault, 1982). The present research draws upon Strong Structuration Theory (SST) (Stones, 2005), the most recent comprehensive development in structuralism (Giddens, 1979, 1984) to guide this empirical investigation and to make sense of the data. Following this lens, the present case study investigates the unfolding interrelation between structural context and the strategic agency of FLMS in their day-to-day strategizing work.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is presented in seven chapters: the introduction, a literature review, a chapter presenting Optica - the organisation where data collection took place, a chapter setting out and justifying the research methodology, a findings chapter, and a discussion chapter before finally presenting conclusions.

1.2.1 Introduction

This first introductory chapter sets out the motivations for the present research and introduces its aim and the research questions. It also clarifies the scope of the present study to allow readers to appreciate what the present study is claiming to achieve and what falls outside of its remit.

1.2.2 Literature review

The Literature Review chapter presents and evaluates relevant academic literature. It helps locating the present thesis within the existing body of theory. The SaP research tenets sit within the wider strategic management field, and the second chapter starts with an overview of the latter. After identifying relevant empirical SaP studies, a critical examination of these studies is conducted. This review reveals an empirical gap in the current SaP literature: we are uninformed about how FLMs strategize. Indeed, an examination of future research directions suggested by leading scholars in the field illustrates a preoccupation with strategy formulation activities. Following that, various definitions of the term strategizing are exposed, revealing how previous SaP studies fell short of developing our understanding of how structure and agency unfolds in the strategizing process. Furthermore, a critical appraisal of empirical SaP papers that mobilised Giddens' Theory of Structuration (ToS) confirms this theoretical gap. Such studies had focused on the agency of social actors, falling short of explicating the interrelation between structure and agency at the individual level in the strategizing practices and praxis.

1.2.3 The research context: Optica

Data collection activities took place in Optica (pseudonym), a store-based, high street, optical retailer operating in the United Kingdom. The third chapter introduces Optica to establish a wider context and justify the choice of this particular company. Optica is an interesting setting to explore 1) how FLMS strategize at the organisation periphery and 2) the interrelation between structure and agency at the individual level in strategizing because it is a multi-unit organisation where a high number of stores are scattered around a large geographical area. This structure gives rise to an interesting setting where front-line managers carry out day-to-day work in an autonomous way with minimal supervision by middle and top managers. This chapter also presents some of the difficulties faced in gaining and maintaining access to the organisation.

1.2.4 Methodology

The fourth chapter, the Research Methodology chapter, clarifies my ontological and epistemological beliefs, which drove the research methodology and data collection methods. I believe that social sciences do not produce universal laws (Giddens, 1984) and that the findings of research “enter constitutively into the world they describe” (Giddens, 1987, p.20). Knowledge is therefore produced when the researcher engages with the lived practices of organisation members (Orlikowski, 2010; Stones, 2005). Equally, the chapter justifies the use of a case study approach to answer the research questions. Indeed, case study approaches allow scholars to investigate the interrelationship between structure and agency within a single setting (Eisenhardt, 1989). Concentrating data collection activities on one organisation also positioned me

very close to the phenomenon of interest, a desirable and shared feature of SaP research. This chapter then provides details about the research participants, and the data collection methods employed. Interviewing, non-participant observations and document collection were employed, and I offer a thorough description of the data collection activities. The chapter also advances Strong Structuration Theory (SST) as the theoretical lens used in the present study to make sense of the field data. After presenting the theory and its main cornerstones, a discussion of how the theory was utilised in terms of advantages and challenges. In particular, I discuss how I identified the theoretical concepts in the field data.

Following this, a comprehensive account of data analysis is elaborated. In the course of the present study, I developed my own four-dimension analysis model Figure 4-2 (p.141). This development was preoccupied in combining two types of methodological bracketing (agent's context analysis and agent's conduct analysis) with an abductive logic (Johnson and Duberley, 2000), whereby I repeatedly employed both inductive and abduct reasoning (Langley, 1999). The data analysis process progressed in two cycles, each consisting of two stages of methodological bracketing: an actor's conduct analysis and an actor's context analysis. The resulting four stages are explicated, summarising 1) the main activities undertaken in every stage; 2) the outcomes of each stage; and, 3) where examples of these outcomes can be found. Following this, a discussion of how reflexivity shaped the research, especially epistemic reflexivity (Johnson and Duberley, 2000) where the development of my knowledge during the course of the present research was reflected upon. This fourth chapter concludes with a thorough account of the measures taken to establish trustworthiness. These

measures were incorporated into the research activities, and took place throughout the research process.

1.2.5 Findings

Chapter five, Findings, presents the empirical data. The data analysis produced 13 emergent themes, organised around, and mapped against, four theoretical concepts. The emerging themes were a result of a free thematic coding of the field data, which gave voice to research participants in answering the exploratory research questions. Here, the unit of analysis is the strategizing practices of FLMs, and in order to unpack these, and answer the research questions, I draw on theoretical concepts from Strong Structuration Theory. These are: external structure, internal structures, agency and outcomes, and FLMs in the flow of position-practice relations. The chapter is organised in four sections, each addresses one of the four research questions presented earlier.

Research participants attributed different characteristics and attached different meanings, to the concept 'organisation's strategy'. Three of these can be seen as external social structures, shared amongst all employees in Optica. These aspects are: seeing strategy as a shared vision/mission; as a brand and a market share; and seeing strategy as targets and key performance indicators. These social structures are external, pressing conditions to FLMs' strategizing practices and praxis. The changes of CEOs over the past 13 years is narrated and how each of these CEOs set out, and communicated a different approach to attain the 'organisation's strategy'. Research participants identified these as important forces that impacted and guided their day-to-day work.

Another type of social structures, which are dependent on the actor's worldviews, predispositions and experience, also influenced strategizing practices and praxis. The data revealed that many research participants linked strategizing activity to the CEO in charge of Optica and justified their inability to contribute to strategy-formulation with their low-level position in the organisation hierarchy. Equally, most research participants believed in the importance of the organisation's strategy in bringing the work of different employees toward a common organisational goal. Lastly, experience within the context, hence within Optica and the optical retail industry, helped FLMs accumulate tacit knowledge to better exploit business opportunities in their stores.

FLMs carry out an endless list of mundane, daily tasks. These tasks aim to manage local employees, and improve the performance of the store. FLMs' strategic agency appears in what I call 'localising', the strategizing praxis used by FLMs to appropriate uniform organisational practices to their local stores. This localisation is driven by the differences between stores in terms of employees and local business environment (clientele and competition). Indeed, FLM agency seems to be restricted to their stores, with no evidence that their local practices are adopted in other stores or at the organisation level.

The last section of the fifth chapter situates FLMs' strategizing practices and praxis within its social context, a flow of position-practice relations (Stones, 2005). Firstly, relations between FLMs and four other types of actors-in-context, or position-practices, are elaborated. FLMs' relation with their direct superiors, the regional managers, has changed over the years, as regional managers became encumbered with overseeing more stores. FLMs develop a support network, to share practices and information, with their peers. Their subordinates,

otherwise, have an important role in releasing FLMs from some of the mundane tasks and allowing them to focus on developing the local business. Moreover, a tension exists between the Head Office at the centre of the organisation, which aims to create uniformity across stores, and the stores at the periphery that seek to localise practices to fit their locale. Furthermore, communications seem essential in the strategizing process. On one hand, non-interactive communication channels (such as emails, printed memos and reports) help Optica to keep track of performance and communicate operational instructions. On the other, interactive communication channels (such as an annual conference and visits to stores by top managers) are used to discuss and communicate the organisation's strategy.

1.2.6 Discussion

The sixth chapter offers interpretations of the findings presented in the preceding chapter. It compares and contrasts the insights drawn from the present case study with current academic knowledge in the SaP stream and the wider strategic management field. The chapter is structured in five sections. The first four sections mirror the issues raised in the literature review chapter, and the last section summarises contributions claimed by the present research.

The first section discusses how FLMs strategize in a store-based multi-unit organisation, thus responding to the empirical gap identified in the current SaP literature. Strategizing appears in the data as a strategy-realising praxis. Top management triggers strategy-realising during an annual conference. This triggering includes announcements of how top managers envisage turning the abstract strategy statement into concrete actions and results. Following this,

FLMs engage in localising practices, appropriating the uniform organisation practices to the local team and the local clientele. FLMs strategize through their active engagement in strategy-realising practices and praxes. This relates directly to a discussion around the concept of strategizing presented in the literature review chapter.

The second section of this chapter discusses enabling and constraining conditions to FLMs' strategizing praxis (localising) in store-based multi-unit organisations. First, the organisation's strategy constrains localising practices of FLMs, guiding them towards uniformity. The concept 'organisation's strategy' appears in the data as a combination of internal and external structures. The internal (individual) component privileges us with accounting for the diversity in how different organisational members discuss the concept 'organisation's strategy'. In particular, FLMs' general-dispositions, about who is responsible for strategizing and how important strategy is, constrain the localising praxis. Second, FLMs' previous experience, resulting in the building of tacit knowledge that is accumulated in the form of conjecturally-specific internal structures, enables localising practices of FLMs. These enabling structural conditions empower FLMs to understand what can and/or need to be localised, and provide them with the experience to do so.

The third section unearths how and when FLMs enact the organisation's strategy in their day-to-day work. I conceptualise localising as a structuration process, composed of multiple, overlapping and recursive cycles of structuration. FLMs draw upon the organisation's strategy in their day-to-day localising work reproducing and/or elaborating the structural conditions that enable or constrain their strategy-realising practices and praxis. Theorising localising as a

structuration process allows me to develop a framework (Figure 6-1) to unpick the interrelation between structural context and strategic agency at the individual level during strategizing, filling a theoretical gap in the current SaP literature.

The fourth section of the Discussion chapter provides critical reflections on the use of SST as a theoretical lens and methodological guidance to drive the present research. SST offers a sophisticated alternative to conduct SaP empirical research, and includes concepts, such as position-practice relations and internal structures, that can be helpful in advancing the SaP research agenda. Nevertheless, the present research exposes two points where SST needs further development. First, SST is discreet about how social structures transpose across space, and I suggest that communications can be crucial to understand that in an organisational setting. Second, I developed the four-dimension analytical framework combining the broad methodological guidance provided in SST with an abductive logic of analysis. Furthermore, theorising through a SST lens required paying due attention to the context of the present research, therefore shaping the theory in a way that serves the objective of this study.

The final section of this chapter summarises the main contributions claimed by the present case-study research. First, the present research advances the notions of strategizing as strategy-realising work. Second, it provides a fresh way to see an organisation's strategy as a combination of internal and external structures. Third, it extends a thin literature on how structural conditions enable and constrain strategizing praxis and practices. Fourth, it portrays strategy-realising as a structuration process. Finally, the present study claims methodological contributions through mobilising SST to conduct SaP empirical research and developing a framework to analyse field data.

1.2.7 Conclusion

The final concluding chapter offers a summary of the thesis, before highlighting key limitations and suggesting future research directions. Adopting a case study research strategy limits the generalisability of the findings, although provides interesting insights into the interrelationship between structure and agency. Further, the present research fell short of studying the effects of macro societal issues such as gender and race, on the strategy-realising work. A future study could use concepts from SST to illuminate this issue. Moreover, the present case study is constructed from the FLMS' point of view, and a future research could look into strategy-realisation from other actors' point of view. In addition, future studies could look into the relationship between the store's performance and the freedom to localise. Lastly, findings from the present study suggest that time and space are important elements in strategizing, and future studies could examine how special and temporal aspects affect strategizing.

The conclusion chapter also elaborates on the practical relevance of the findings. In particular, it suggests FLMS training programs in multi-unit organisations to include decision-making exercises that goes beyond the stores and covers other functions and geographical locations. Further, the findings suggest that gaining experience in different stores is essential in localising. Hence, an official rotating programme, where FLMS change their stores, can help managers build valuable tacit knowledge.

1.3 Chapter summary

This chapter has put forward motivations for the topic of the present research, arguing that it is worthy of empirical investigation. It therefore

incentivised the research aim, and introduced the research questions, thereby establishing the significance and scope of the present study.

The chapter also offers a roadmap for the rest of the thesis. The current study contributes to the Strategy as Practice literature, responding to a gap about how Front-Line Managers strategize. To conduct the study, Strong Structuration Theory is chosen as an appropriate theory to guide and theorise the present research. Optica, the multi-unit optical retailer where data collection activities took place, is briefly introduced to establish the research context, before concisely outlining the methodology adopted for the research. Equally, this chapter presented the main findings and outlined answers to the research questions, thereby stating the main contributions claimed.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

2.1 Overview of the chapter

The first chapter offered the motivations for carrying out the present research, and an overall view of this thesis. This second chapter provides a review of the relevant literature, setting the background for theoretical and empirical contributions. It reviews current debates in the Strategy as Practice (SaP) research stream, and critically evaluates some of the discoveries claimed around strategizing. It also presents and justifies the theoretical lens adopted to guide and interpret the present case study.

The first section of the chapter provides an overview of the strategic management field. Authors tend to cluster research in this field into fewer categories to overcome the multiplicity of approaches, and present the research in a concise manner (e.g. Mintzberg et al., 1998; Whittington, 2001). This is helpful, although some shortfalls exist, as the discussion of Whittington's (2001) categorisation illustrates. Following that, the discussion turns into signifying how strategic management research assigns different meanings to the most popular term in this literature: 'organisation's strategy' (2.2.2, p.34). The multiplicity of approaches in this field is driven by changes in the wider scholarly interests in what goes on inside; or around organisations as argued by Hoskisson et al. (1999). In the recent decade, a wider turn to focus on what people actually do inside the organisation gave rise to the practice turn in strategy research, also known as Strategy as Practice (SaP).

Once the wider strategic management literature is established, the discussion focuses on the SaP research stream, and empirical work that shares some similarities with the present case study. SaP perceives strategy primarily as the work of managers, and calls for further research into strategizing practices, practitioners and praxis (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006). SaP attracts scholars from various disciplines with shared interest in the strategizing phenomenon. Therefore, it is necessary to appraise how this phenomenon appears in the literature (2.4.1, p.43). A critical review of the existing definitions of strategizing and how they relate to structure, agency and the relationship between them exposes a theoretical gap: SaP scholars have paid scarce attention to the interaction between structure and agency in the social practice.

As a very young research movement, SaP managed to distinguish itself from other contemporary research traditions, and we must be clear about these differences and what this dissection entails. Following that, I draw on a framework presented by Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) to identify studies that share similar interests with the present research. Once identified, these studies are scrutinised to reveal parallels (2.4.3, p.55). The review reveals an empirical gap addressed by the current research, that is: the absence of research into how Front-Line Managers (FLMs) accomplish strategizing work. A return to the wider strategic management field unearths a limited view on the issue (2.4.4, p.61) where the general assumption stipulates that FLMs lack strategic agency. Indeed, drawing on recent work by Vaara and Whittington (2012) reveals that SaP is largely preoccupied with studying strategy-formulation practices and praxis. This stands in contrast to the strategizing definitions advocated by SaP since its inception,

incentivising research into all types of strategy work, from the formulation to the executing.

The final few sections of this chapter examine structurationism as a theoretical platform from which SaP empirical research can be conducted and theorised. The first section advocates the choice of structurationism as a suitable lens to study the interrelationship between structure and agency in the strategizing process. Following this, the foundational concepts of the Theory of Structuration (ToS), which can be found in the early work of Anthony Giddens (1979, 1984), are presented. A critical review of how SaP scholars mobilised ToS exposes and confirms the theoretical gap revealed earlier. Empirical SaP studies have been examining the actors' strategic agency and the consequences thereof. However, we are still lacking research into how the interrelation between structure and agency unfolds at the individual level in the flow of strategy praxis.

2.2 Strategic management research, a brief background

Strategic management research continues to draw on different disciplines to enhance our understanding of strategy and strategic management, such as ecology (e.g. Boeker, 1991) sociology (e.g. Pettigrew, 2012) and micro economics (e.g. Govindahajan, 1986), to name a few. One of the most recent shifts in this field, Strategy as Practice (Balogun et al., 2003; Best, 2012; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 1996, 2007), emerged in the past two decades (Carter et al., 2008b) adding to the many existing perspectives on strategic management (cf. Johnson et al., 2007b; Mellahi and Sminia, 2009; Mintzberg et al., 1998; Sminia, 2009; Whittington, 2001). The present research is born out of and into the SaP perspective, and it is necessary to provide a

background overview of the strategic management field, and how SaP sits with other perspectives (2.2.1, p.28).

Before studying the strategizing of FLMs, one needs to understand what the word 'strategy' means. One of the biggest challenges facing scholars embarking on their first research in the strategic management field is to define the concept 'organisation's strategy'. Surveying the literature reveals a plethora of descriptions, explanations, and notions of the term 'strategy' (Mintzberg et al., 1998; Steensen, 2014). Not only that there is no consensus, but some of these definitions actually contradict each other. Therefore, an overview of how the term is used in the literature is essential (2.2.2, p.34).

How can one explain these disparities in the field? Hoskisson et al. (1999) suggest that the strategic management arena has witnessed several shifts in the ontological position and epistemological approaches to study the phenomenon that is 'strategy' over the past few decades (2.2.3, p.37). These shifts are strongly influenced by developments made in the wider management and organisation studies, and social sciences areas. Indeed, it is possible to trace the origins of SaP to the so called 'practice turn' in organisation research (2.2.3, p. 37).

This background sets the scene for the rest of the chapter where relevant SaP literature is identified and critically reviewed.

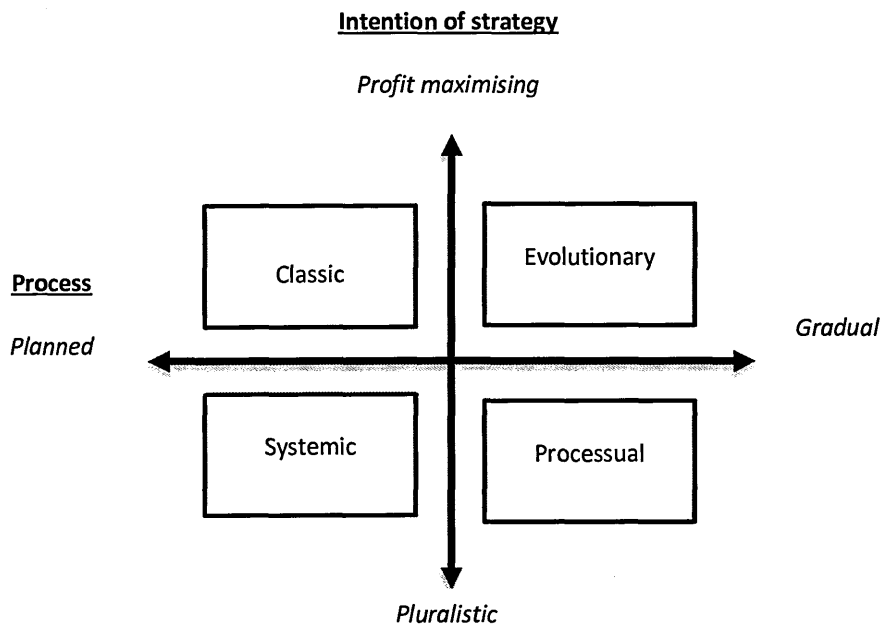
2.2.1 Whittington's perspectives on strategy

Numerous books and articles present, and debate, the various perspectives on strategy and strategic management (e.g. Johnson et al., 2007b; Mellahi and Sminia, 2009; Mintzberg et al., 1998; Sminia, 2009; Whittington, 2001). Whittington's (2001) work is useful in providing a broad overview of the

field. He (Whittington, 2001) classifies different streams in strategic management research according to two dimensions. First, how a particular stream of research sees the intention of strategy. In this dimension, Whittington (2001) positions profit maximising on one extreme, versus pluralistic goals on the other. Second, whether that stream of research sees strategy as a planned and deliberate process; or a gradual and emergent one. Four perspectives on strategic management research emerge from using these two dimensions (Figure 2-1, p. 30).

The first perspective, the classic, includes pivotal work that marked the birth of modern strategic management research in the early 60s (Mintzberg et al., 1998; Whittington, 2001). Furrer et al. (2008) specify three main seminal works: Drucker's management by objectives (Drucker, 1954), Chandler's proposition on the relationship between structure and strategy (Chandler, 1962) and Ansoff's work on horizontal and vertical integration (Ansoff, 1965).

Figure 2-1 Whittington's perspectives on strategy (2001, p.3)



The classic perspective sees strategic management as a rational behaviour driven by self-interest and profit maximisation (e.g. Grant, 1991). Strategic management is preoccupied with making better decisions about the long-term directions of the business (Whittington, 1996). Therefore, only a limited number of specialists carry out strategizing who require a particular set of tools and skills to do the job (Mintzberg et al., 1998). The classical research stream aimed to arm managerial elites with such tools and skills (Whittington, 1996). Moreover, strategy-formulation and implementation are seen as two formal, premeditated and separate processes (Whittington, 2001). The classical perspective resonates most with Mintzberg et al's (1998) design, planning and positioning schools of thought on strategy-formulation.

The evolutionary perspective on strategy agrees with the classical, and sees maximising profit in the long-term as the primary intention for strategic management. However, rather than looking inside the organisation, evolutionists attribute firms' success or failure to external market mechanisms (Mintzberg et al., 1998). Whittington (2001) lists Hannan and Freeman's population ecology (Hannan and Freeman, 1984) and Williamson's transaction cost economics (Williamson, 1985) as founding constructs of the evolutionary perspective. Evolutionists attribute the success or failure of a firm to the interactions between that firm and the surrounding market forces (Hsu et al., 2009). Hence, strategic management is concerned with surviving the turbulent business environment (Hannan, 2005), and managers' rational planning is irrelevant to the firm's performance or success (Whittington, 2001). Instead of conducting a careful analysis and drafting a plan, managers should occupy themselves with finding the best way to guarantee the firm's survival (Hannan, 1988).

The third perspective, the processual, focuses on internal organisational issues, such as politics within the organisation (Pettigrew, 1985) and the managerial cognitive skills necessary to craft strategy (Mintzberg, 1987). According to this perspective, outcomes of the strategy process are a result of complex and rich human interactions (Pettigrew, 1985). Particularly of interest here are the interactions between humans and also between humans and their environment. These interactions are felt to be governed by three factors: self-interest, knowledge and political bargaining (Whittington, 2001). The complexity of these interactions makes it almost impossible to agree on a long-term plan, and makes the outcomes of planning processes unpredictable. Mintzberg (1994) pushes this idea to an extreme, claiming that formal strategy analysis can be a

form of distraction in organisations. Under this perspective, economic rationales also become less relevant to strategy (Mintzberg, 2000; Sminia, 2009). Instead, strategy is crafted through an emergent process and it is ever evolving in a pluralistic context based on negotiation and learning from mistakes (Mintzberg, 1987).

The fourth and last perspective on strategic management, the systemic perspective, draws on sociological thinking and stresses the 'embeddedness' of actions within their social context (Regnér, 2003). Hence, strategic objectives and processes are largely dependent on the particular social and cultural context (system and structure) that envelops strategizing (Hendry and Seidl, 2003). Profit maximisation, thus, becomes one of many criteria to judge a firm's strategy outcomes. The strategist's social characteristics (such as social norms, social class, educational background and religion) have an influence on the objectives of strategy and the process of strategy-making (Rouleau, 2005). Furthermore, the systemic perspective holds that strategists (within organisations) are rational in relation to their social context (Howard-Grenville, 2007). Strategizing then becomes a process defined by, and embedded in, the social actors, their actions and their social context (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 1996). The SaP research movement is located within this systemic perspective (more details in 2.2.3, p.37).

Whittington's perspectives are useful because they allow a concise overview of the strategic management literature. Nevertheless, they can be considered as an over simplification since setting boundaries between the perspectives are artificial. For instance, scholars have been debating the links and overlaps between the processual and systemic approaches (Carter et al.,

2008b; Whittington, 2007, and a forthcoming issue in the *Strategic Management Journal*). Furthermore, the underlying assumption that seeing strategy as profit maximising stands in opposition to pluralistic goals (vertical axis in Figure 2-1, p.30) sits with unease in the light of literature on non-market strategies (Aggarwal, 2001; Baron, 1995) and on strategizing in pluralistic contexts (Denis et al., 2007; Fenton and Jarzabkowski, 2006). While simplified models are generally welcomed, they should be used with caution as they run the danger of reifying distinctions, polarizing research approaches rather than exposing shared assumptions (Farjoun, 2010).

More recently, Furrer et al. (2008) reviewed strategic management literature in four leading North American journals, concluding that strategic management scholars are concerned with six core issues. These are: strategy and its environment, strategy process and top management, corporate strategy and financial models, growth and market entry, industry and competition, and the resource-based view of the firm (Furrer et al., 2008, p.11). These core themes provide an alternative view of the literature by examining the phenomenon studied. Nonetheless, this classification still attempts to divide the current literature into different and distinct streams.

Instead of dividing the literature into different streams of research, there have been calls to adopt a pluralistic view that goes beyond classification and into integration (Scherer, 1998). This, however, is difficult to achieve since different schools of thought rely on varying, and often incompatible, ontological assumptions (cf. Mir and Watson, 2000; Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007; Powell, 2003). Furthermore, there is no agreement within the strategic management literature on how to define the concept 'organisation's strategy'.

2.2.2 Steensen's five types of organisational strategy

Steensen (2014) argues there are three basic "perceptions" of the concept 'organisation's strategy' in the current literature (Steensen, 2014, p.268). First, an organisational strategy is about strategic intentions, reflecting the ambitions of the key strategists about the future of the organisation. Second, an organisational strategy is about strategic communications, reflecting the content announced to stakeholders. Third, an organisational strategy is about the realised strategy; those actual actions and activities of organisational members.

Using these three perceptions, Steensen suggests five types of organisation's strategy, represented in Figure 2-2 (p.35) are discernible. Shared strategy refers to the formal communications made by the top managers about their aspirations for the future of the organisation (e.g. Chandler, 1962; Hamel and Prahalad, 1989; Porter, 1996). Hidden strategy alludes to the managers' implicit intentions that remain uncommunicated (e.g. Hax, 1993; Mintzberg and Waters, 1982; Sminia, 2005). False strategy accounts for the discrepancy between the strategic directions announced to stakeholders and the actual intentions of top managers (e.g. Heil and Robertson, 1991; Peattie, 1993). Learning strategy pertains to the capacity of an organisation to develop and take actions that have not been deliberately pursued (e.g. Beer et al., 2005; Bierly and Hämäläinen, 1995; Huber, 1991). The final type, the realized strategy, comprises the actual actions and interactions among actors, deliberate or otherwise, as the source of the organisational strategy (e.g. Johnson, 1987; Mintzberg and Waters, 1985; Pettigrew, 1977).

These five types, therefore different ways of conceptualising the term 'strategy', evidence the preoccupation of current strategic management literature with strategy-formulation, either as a deliberate or an emergent process (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985). In fact, studies cited as an example of realized strategy in the review (Steensen, 2014, pp.272-273), actually look at strategy-formulation, not realisation, within the actions and interactions of the actors. This indicates the difficulties faced by researchers to discern strategy-realising activities in empirical work. None of these referenced studies (Hodgkinson et al., 2006; Johnson, 1987; Pettigrew, 1977; Whittington et al., 2006; Wilson and Jarzabkowski, 2004) examines how the concept of 'strategy' is turned into day-to-day work, or how it is enacted in the routine work of managers.

Figure 2-2 The strategy wheel (Steensen, 2014, p.270)



One remarkable insight from Steensen's work (2014) is the opportunity for an organisation to have multiple 'types' of strategies simultaneously (see also Jarzabkowski, 2005), or what the author calls "strategy heterogeneity" (Steensen, 2014, p.273). Steensen believes that strategy heterogeneity stems from four types of inconsistencies within organisations (Steensen, 2014, p.275), these are:

- Inconsistencies in the intentions of multiple strategy actors;
- Inconsistencies in the messages communicated by strategy actors;
- Inconsistencies between the intentions and the communications of the strategy actors; and
- Inconsistencies between the intention and/or the communications on the one hand, and the learning potential on the other.

Oftentimes, SaP research assumes that the organisation's strategy has a single, shared and agreed-upon meaning in a given context, therefore SaP empirical research does not account for strategy heterogeneity. Steensen's (2014) review offers a fresh and interesting perspective, which agrees with SaP in seeing strategy as the work of managers (whether intended or communicated), but adds another layer of contextuality. SaP scholars, equipped with theories of practice and positioned close to the strategizing activities, are well positioned to examine strategy heterogeneity.

While this is enlightening, Steensen's (2014) justification for strategy heterogeneity is concerned with tensions at the organisation level, without descending to the individual level. In other words, it falls short of explaining why two different FLMs have different views on strategy in the first place before deciding on a future view of the organisation (intentions).

2.2.3 Inside-outside swings of strategy research

The diversity in strategic management research could be attributed to the variation in theoretical lenses adopted to understand the phenomenon of an organisation's strategy (Mintzberg et al., 1998; Whittington, 2001). However, Hoskisson et al. (1999) argue that the diversity actually stems from shifts in scholarly interests over the past few decades. The authors trace these shifts by studying methodological approaches to conducting strategic management research chronologically (Hoskisson et al., 1999).

They (Hoskisson et al., 1999) claim that in its early days, single case studies dominated strategic management research, and scholars were interested in the work of top managers inside organisations (e.g. Drucker, 1954). This evolved slowly towards an interest in the environment surrounding the organisation, such as studies at the industry and market level (e.g. Porter, 1980). Later, strategic management research returned to focus on the inside of organisations, and employed qualitative methods to study individual managers (e.g. Pettigrew, 1985). A while later, scholars relocated their interest to the external business environment again (e.g. Christensen and Bower, 1996). In the last decade, we have witnessed a coming back of interest in what strategists do inside organisations (Abdallah and Langley, 2014; Balogun and Johnson, 2005; Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2008; Mirabeau and Maguire, 2014; Mollick, 2012; Rouleau, 2005).

This chronological presentation allows the authors (Hoskisson et al., 1999) to demonstrate a 'swing' of scholarly interest over the past few decades between, at one end, what individuals do inside organisations and, at the other, how

environmental factors outside the organisation influence performance. SaP can be seen as a continuum to the most recent swing, where scholars re-focused their research on what the individual actors inside organisations actually do (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2007a; Whittington, 2006).

2.3 *The practice turn in organisation research*

Undeniably, strategic management research trends are part of the wider research movements in the management and organisation studies field, and in social sciences (Nicolini, 2012). Hence, it is possible to trace the origins and motives of SaP in these two larger areas of research.

At the social science level, Reckwitz (2002, p.245) distinguishes between two genres in social theories. On the one hand, classical social theories (e.g. Marx and Engels, 1848/1948; Weber, 1904/1930) are mainly concerned with either the *homo economicus*; where by actions are motivated by individuals' pursuit of maximising self-interests, or the *homo sociologicus*, where actions are explained through the norm-following, rule-playing actor. Cultural social theories, on the other hand, explain and recognise actions through interpretations and the symbolic structures of meanings (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; Foucault, 1982; Giddens, 1984). The emergence of cultural social theories in recent decades led to a growing interest in everyday occurrences and the life-world, which drove the "turn to practice" (Reckwitz, 2002, p.244).

At the Management and Organisation Studies (MOS) level, Nicolini (2012), following Bloor (1976), suggests that the turn to practice theories has been underpinned by two motivations.

First, MOS scholars had been building abstract theories, which are distanced from the organisational activities they are supposed to explain and engage with (Barley and Kunda, 2001; Holt and Zundel, 2014; Zundel and Kokkalis, 2010). MOS needed to re-focus on what people actually do inside organisations (Ahrens and Chapman, 2007; Carroll et al., 2008; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). The reporting, describing and theorising of the working life of organisational members necessitated that scholars embrace suitable research approaches (Barley and Kunda, 2001, p.84; Holt and Zundel, 2014). Practice theories offered an appropriate methodological approach to examine the day-to-day work and to bring back the individuals into MOS (Orlikowski, 2010; Reckwitz, 2002).

Second, engaging with practice theory could be seen as a much deeper ontological commitment by MOS scholars (Nicolini, 2012) to explain complex phenomena through the practices of actors within their organisational context (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011, p.1241). Following some philosophical traditions, MOS scholars see organisations and the phenomena of interest through the practices of individual actors (Schatzki, 2002, 2005). The turn to practice in MOS allowed researchers to embrace the complexity of the contemporary organisation, viewing it not as mechanistic nor as functional, but as a part of a fluid world, where this world “unfolds in front of us” (Nicolini, 2012, p.2). By doing so, the “re-turn of practice” in organisation studies must not be seen as only a theoretical and methodological agenda (Miettinen et al., 2009, p.1314), but also an ontological and epistemic one (Nicolini, 2012; Orlikowski, 2010).

Schatzki (2001) stipulates that the practice turn in organisation research have its roots in philosophy, social theory and technology. These varying origins produced several practice approaches within MOS, and several definitions of the term 'practice' (Carter et al., 2008b; Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008a). Nonetheless, practice theorists are said to share three distinctive features (Schatzki, 2001, pp.11-12). First, the field of practices is composed of naturally occurring human phenomena, such as knowledge (Giddens, 1984); meaning (Bourdieu, 1977); human activity (Engeström, 1987); and language (Foucault, 1982). Second, practices are seen as embodied human activities, organised around practical understanding (Bourdieu, 1990; Chia and Holt, 2006; de Certeau, 1984; Giddens, 1979). This practical understanding is mirrored in the shared knowledge and skills amongst social actors (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984). Thirdly, practice theorists pay due attention to the performativity of the non-human in social practices (Greenhalgh and Stones, 2010; Latour, 2005). In their studies, many practice scholars interweave non-human entities into the human activities that constitute the social praxis (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Paroutis et al., 2015; Werle and Seidl, 2015).

These three shared concerns lead practice scholars to advocate a contextualised interpretation of empirical statements, allowing a specific way of understanding and analysing social phenomena (Reckwitz, 2002, p.257). Hence, social practice theories "shift[ed] bodily movements, things, practical knowledge and routine to the centre of its vocabulary" (Reckwitz, 2002, p.259). This shift has resulted in a scholarly debate surrounding (1) what people actually do (Rouleau, 2013), (2) the relationship between human actions and the 'systems' in which these actions are contextualised (Herepath, 2014), and (3) the role of agents in

the reproduction of the phenomenon under study (Ortner, 1984; Wright, forthcoming). The origins of the SaP research agenda is usually traced to this 'practice turn' in social sciences and MOS (Golsorkhi et al., 2010; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 1996, 2006).

2.4 Strategy as Practice

Contemporaneously, strategy research pays more attention than ever to the 'doing' of strategy by individuals (Balogun and Johnson, 2005; Jarzabkowski, 2008; Mantere, 2005; Samra-Fredericks, 2003). SaP scholarship calls for research into the 'nitty-gritty' daily micro-activities that affect the organisation's strategy (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Johnson et al., 2007a; Johnson et al., 2003; Whittington, 1996, 2006). Strategy is seen as "a situated, socially accomplished activity" and "strategizing comprises those actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing that activity" (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, pp.7-8). Hence, strategy is something that organisational members do together (Jarzabkowski, 2004), and the SaP research agenda is concerned with "who does it [strategy], what they do, how they do it, what they use, and what implication this has for shaping strategy" (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009, p.69).

The work of Henry Mintzberg can be considered as early movement towards humanising the strategy research. Mintzberg and Waters (1985) stipulated that the strategy formation process accommodates an 'emergent strategy'. This pattern of action allows organisations to take advantage of unforeseen circumstances, adapting to the environment within the light of the intended organisational strategy (Mirabeau and Maguire, 2014). Hence, the

organisation's 'realised strategy' is a combination of two types of organisational strategy: intended and emergent. Mintzberg and McHugh (1985) illuminated this concept with an example of how a filmmaker's approach has been adopted across the national film board of Canada. This emergence of strategy describes the process through which organisational strategy is formulated, examining how strategy is managed at the organisational-level. As such, organisation strategy should be seen as, and born out of, a pattern of actions over time (Mintzberg et al., 1998). Indeed, Mintzberg has shown an interest in managerial work (e.g. Mintzberg, 1973), managers (e.g. Mintzberg, 2004) and the tools (e.g. Mintzberg, 1994) used by managers in crafting and formulating strategies. These interests can be approximately mapped against a renewed interest within the SaP field in praxis, practitioners and practices (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006). Organisation's strategy in Mintzbergian tradition is born out of managerial work and, therefore; should not be merely simplified into rational, premeditated and analytical exercise.

The SaP move within strategy research fits with the wider 'practice turn' in social sciences and MOS discussed earlier (Johnson et al., 2007a), and the call to engage with people and what they do in management research (Barley and Kunda, 2001). Equally, it can be considered as part of the evolutionary pattern of strategic management research, what Hoskisson et al. (1999) call swings of a pendulum (2.2.3, p.37). However, other factors related to the actual business environment, rather than scholarly research trends, encouraged the emergence of SaP. A changing competitive environment shifted the level (lower) and the frequency (more often) of strategic activities in contemporary organisations (Johnson et al., 2003). First, flatter organisational structures facilitated and

necessitated including more managers in the strategizing process (Whittington and Melin, 2003). Strategizing activities are no longer exclusive to head offices, as they are now pushed 'down and out' towards the organisations' peripheries (e.g. Stensaker and Falkenberg, 2007). This push invited research into the role of non-senior managers in the strategizing process, including middle managers who maintain regular contact with external and internal 'customers' (e.g. Ahrens and Chapman, 2007; Regnér, 2003; Rouleau, 2005). Second, the speeding up of the external environment has changed strategy-formulation from an occasional deliberate planning event, to a continuously evolving social practice (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1997).

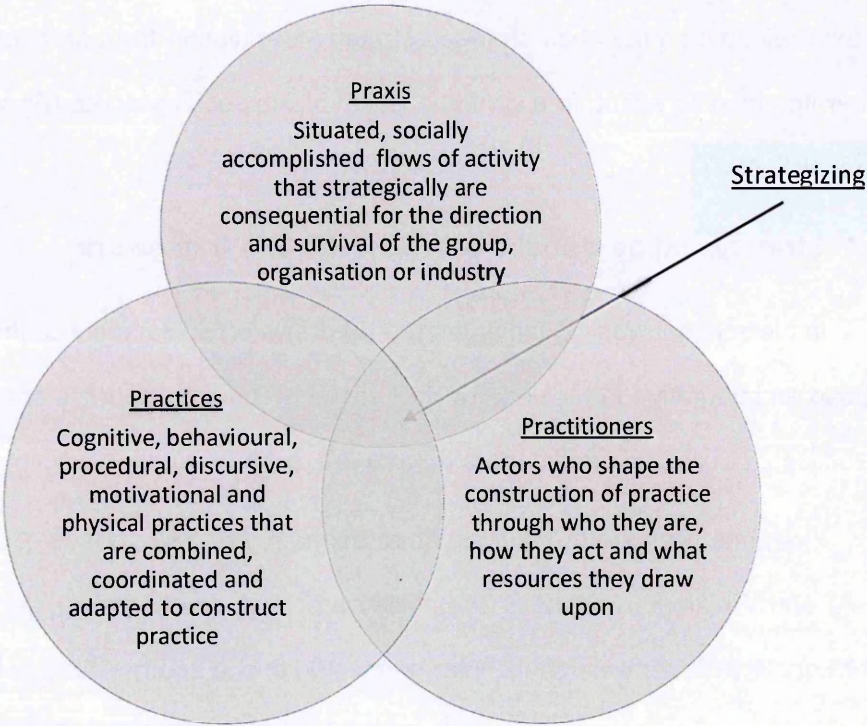
2.4.1 Strategizing as a social process: the 3Ps framework

In his seminal work, Whittington (2006) draws on social practice theory to propose an integrative framework for SaP studies. This framework is composed of practices, praxis and practitioners (Figure 2-3, p.44).

First, practices are the "substructure beneath the busy surface of events" (Vaara and Whittington, 2012, p.288). They are "routinized types of behaviour which consist of several elements, inter-connected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (Reckwitz, 2002, p.249). SaP scholars draw on diverse philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the term to conduct their research (Golsorkhi et al., 2010; Nicolini, 2012; Schatzki, 2006). As a result, numerous forms of strategizing practices co-exist in SaP literature, including discourse (Laine and Vaara, 2007); knowledge (Clarke et al., 2012); use of strategy tools

(Kaplan, 2011); and actions taken by managers (Balogun and Johnson, 2005). Having said that, many SaP studies highlight the recursive and routinized nature of strategizing practices within its organisational context (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Regnér, 2008; Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2011; Whittington, 2006).

Figure 2-3 The 3Ps framework (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, p.11; Whittington, 2006)



Second, praxis refers to what practitioners actually do when they carry out the work of strategy, incorporating “the routine and the non-routine, the formal and the informal, activities at the corporate centre and activities at the organisational periphery” (Whittington, 2006, p.619). Praxis alludes to the flow of strategic activities, by which strategy is crafted (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Johnson et al., 2007a). It is the stream of activity that interconnects the practitioners with the

institutions which they draw upon, operate within, and contribute to (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009, p.73). In other words, praxis emerges as and from the dynamic interaction between structure and active agency (Sztompka, 1991). Examples of strategizing praxis include board meetings and strategy planning processes (Vaara and Whittington, 2012, p.290). Broadly speaking, SaP strategizing praxes exist at three levels (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009, p.74): the micro; the actors' specific experience of particular actions, the meso; the organisational level, and the macro; the institutional or the industry level.

Third, practitioners are the social actors who do the work of strategy, and have a direct or indirect influence over the strategy (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009; Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008b; Mantere, 2005; Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Whittington, 2006). Practitioners are skilled individuals who interact socially in the 'doing' of strategy (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Whittington, 2006). Additionally, their agency shapes the strategy work through "who they are, how they act, and what practices they draw upon in that action" (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, p.10). Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) identify three types of strategy practitioners: individual actors within organisations, such as a top manager in Samra-Fredericks (2003); aggregate actor within organisations, like the middle managers in Mantere (2008); and extra-organisational aggregate actor, such as the consultants in Laine (2007).

Strategizing describes the 'doing of strategy', as it is the nexus of these three earlier elements: practices, praxis and practitioners (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, p.8). To study strategizing, researchers are invited to construct research questions focusing on one element (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009; Vaara and Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2006), or on one of the intersections between two

elements (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Focusing on any of these research areas shifts the empirical emphasis of the study to that area (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). However, having an empirical emphasis on one element will necessarily involve engaging with the other two (Whittington, 2006). For example, one might want to investigate top managers' political tactics in meetings (practices), but this investigation inevitably leads one to consider the flow of these practices (the praxis) and the actors involved in conducting these practices (practitioners).

Empirical and theoretical SaP studies offer varying definitions of the term 'strategizing', and a sample of 12 definitions are presented in Table 2-1 below (p.47). This disparity could be due to both (1) the absence of a unanimously agreed definition of the term 'practice' within the wider theories of practice (Nicolini, 2012; Schatzki, 2001), and (2) the all-inclusive definition of practitioners offered by SaP scholars (e.g. Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006). This lack of clarity has been considered as a theoretical weakness of the SaP research approach (Carter et al., 2008b). However, SaP scholars celebrate this diversity, insisting that SaP must be seen as an "umbrella construct" (Floyd et al., 2011) bridging strategy research with sociology and MOS.

Broadly speaking, theoretical SaP papers offer strategizing definitions that could be seen too broad and lacking precisions. For instance, Johnson et al. (2003, p.14) stipulate that strategizing includes "the detailed processes and practices which constitute the day-to-day activities of organisational life and which relate to strategic outcomes", whilst Fenton and Jarzabkowski (2006, p.632) suggest that strategizing is "those planning, resource allocation, monitoring and control practices and processes through which strategy is enacted".

Table 2-1 A sample of theoretical and empirical definitions of strategizing

Source	Strategizing Definition
Whittington (1996, p.732)	"all the meeting, the talking, the form-filling and the number-crunching by which strategy actually gets formulated and implemented"
Whittington and Leif (2003, p.35)	"the continuous processes involved in moving towards and moving along such [organisational] strategies and forms" and "organizing and strategizing will be treated not as two discrete practices, but as inextricably linked together, a single duality rather than separable building blocks"
Johnson et al. (2003, p.14)	"the detailed processes and practices which constitute the day-to-day activities of organisation life and which relate to strategic outcomes"
Maitlis and Lawrence (2003, p.111)	"micro-level processes and practices involved as organisational members work to construct and enact organisational strategies, through both formal and informal means"
Balogun et al. (2003, pp.199-200)	"Studying practitioners and their practices within the context of their work." and "understanding tacit, deeply embedded, and therefore hard to get at phenomena"
Jarzabkowski (2005, p.154)	"the interplay between top managers and those situated practices that mediate the shaping of strategy over time" and "actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing"
Fenton and Jarzabkowski (2006, p.632)	"those planning, resource allocation, monitoring and control practices and processes through which strategy is enacted"
Johnson et al. (2007, p.6)	"The practice of managing strategy"
Denis et al. (2007, p.183)	The authors theorise strategizing "as a 'translation process', as an 'accommodation process', and as a 'social practice'"
Jarzabkowski et al. (2007, p.8)	"the doing of strategy, or the construction of this flow of activity through the actions and interactions of multiple actors and the practices that they draw upon" and "Strategizing occurs at the nexus between praxis, practices and practitioners"
Jarzabkowski (2008)	Strategizing in this paper refers to behaviours (interactive, procedural and integrative) which are combined in a process (strategizing patterns)
Chia and Mackay (2007, p.23)	"collective, culturally shaped accomplishment attained through historically and culturally transmitted social practices and involving dispositions, propensities and tendencies"

To complement the general theoretical definitions, SaP empirical papers assume a working definition of strategizing for that particular study. This should be expected since strategizing practices and praxis must be placed within the specific context in which they occur (Balogun et al., 2003; Reckwitz, 2002). What constitutes strategizing, then, is closely related to the research settings, the research questions and the unit of analysis (Balogun et al., 2003). For instance, Jarzabkowski (2008) zoomed in on top managers' behaviours during strategy meetings, and how these behaviours are combined over time to shape strategies at three universities. Hence, she (Jarzabkowski, 2008) considers strategizing to be managerial behaviours (interactive, procedural and integrative) which are combined in a process (strategizing patterns). In another example, Samra-Fredericks (2003) examines the discourse of six strategists whilst developing a five-year strategy for their business, illustrating how one of these six strategists was able to steer the strategy-formulation process. Therefore, the author considers strategizing in this context to be "accomplished during 'real-time' talk-based interaction" (Samra-Fredericks, 2003, p.142). These two examples, then, illustrate how empirical SaP studies construct a 'context-led' definition of strategizing. This allows movement from an abstract description, such as Fenton and Jarzabkowski's (2006, p.632) definition "those planning, resource allocation, monitoring and control practices and processes through which strategy is enacted"; to a social praxis conducted by particular actors in a particular organisation, such as the interactive, procedural and integrative patterns of top managers' behaviours described by Jarzabkowski (2008).

A more fine-grained examination of the above sample reveals a theoretical gap (see **Table 2-2** below). All but one paper remain mute about the relationship between structure and agency in the process of strategizing.

Table 2-2 How social structures, social agency and the relation between them appear in the sample

Source	Social Structure(s)	Social Agency	The relation between them
Whittington (1996)	Routines, ways of doing things in a particular context	Not explicitly articulated	Not explicitly articulated
Whittington and Melin (2003)	Organisation structure, ways of organising activities within organisations	Not explicitly articulated, but can be interpreted as organising actions of actors	Not explicitly articulated, but can be interpreted as a duality between organising and strategizing
Johnson et al. (2003)	Not explicitly articulated	Managerial agency, and the ability of managers to influence strategic activities	Not explicitly articulated
Maitlis and Lawrence (2003)	Not explicitly articulated, but can be interpreted as pre-existing positions and resources	Not explicitly articulated, but can be interpreted as engagement with discursive and political elements	Not explicitly articulated
Balogun et al. (2003)	Not explicitly articulated	Not explicitly articulated	Not explicitly articulated
Jarzabkowski (2005)	Collective routines, norms, roles, habitation and resources	practical-evaluative wisdom when dealing with situated and distributed activities	Not explicitly articulated. However, Jarzabkowski draws extensively on Giddens' notion of the duality of structure: actors draw on structures as a source of power to lend meaning to action, and by doing so the actors reinforce the social system.
Fenton and Jarzabkowski (2006)	Organisational hierarchy and macro state power structure	Not explicitly articulated	Not explicitly articulated

Johnson et al. (2007)	No dedicated section	No dedicated section, appears implicit in 'what people do'	Not explicitly articulated
Denis et al. (2007)	Organisational hierarchy and norms, and macro societal order	Not explicitly articulate, but seems implicit in the ability of actors to acquire skills through participating in institutionalised routines	Not explicitly articulated
Jarzabkowski et al. (2007)	Not explicitly articulated	Actions and interactions of practitioners, ways of behaving, thinking, emoting, knowing and acting	Not explicitly articulated
Jarzabkowski (2008)	An independent historical accumulation of beliefs, norms and interests	Not explicitly articulated, but can be interpreted as the actions of the organisational actors in the institutionalisation process	Behavioural regularities to modify and sustain institutional guidelines
Chia and Mackay (2007)	Not explicitly articulated	Not explicitly articulated	Not explicitly articulated: the authors invite researchers to renounce the dualism and favour the primacy of social practice

The fine-grained examination involved examining how each study explicitly defines social agency, social structures and the relationship thereof. When a paper is explicit when explicating each of these concepts, the explanation is inserted in the Table (2-2). If the paper is not explicit, I attempted to interpret how the authors wrote about and discussed these concepts. The majority of studies remain silent on how structure and agency comes together in the strategizing process. Two studies deserve a special attention. First, Jarzabkowski (2008) explicitly discusses the relationship between structure and agency relying on Barley and Tolbert's (1985) theoretical development of ToS. She (Jarzabkowski, 2008) considers this a recursive relation that either sustains or modifies institutional regularities overtime. As such, the author looked at how the collective actions of a group of managers modify or reproduce organisation-level norms. Second, Chia and Mackay (2007) actually departs from a position rejecting the ontological distinction between structure and agency. Hence, their paper would have rejected any kind of relationship between the two.

2.4.2 How is SaP different to other traditions in strategic management

It is beneficial to clarify how SaP is distinctive from other contemporary research traditions in strategy. Vaara and Whittington (2012) considered the similarities and differences between SaP and four other contemporary approaches, which are: strategy process, micro-foundations, institutional theory and institutional work (Table 2-3, p.54). Notably, there are four distinctive features that set SaP apart from the other approaches (Vaara and Whittington, 2012). First, SaP methodologies draw on sociological theories rather than macro and micro economic theories (cf. Golsorkhi et al., 2010; Seidl and Whittington, 2014).

Second, SaP research has drawn attention to performativity rather than the economic performance of the organisation (Vaara and Whittington, 2012). Performativity in the SaP field refers to the performance of practices and practitioners in the strategy praxis (Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008b, p.102) and to the performance of praxis (Cabantous and Gond, 2011). Third, SaP scholars have studied a wide range of organisations, including not-for-profit and public organisations (Denis et al., 2011; Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2011). This has extended the conventional exclusive interest in the private sector. Fourth, SaP shifted methodological approaches in strategic management from quantitatively dominated to qualitatively dominated approaches and methods. Qualitative approaches allow SaP researchers to get very close to their unit of analysis (Balogun and Johnson, 2005; Samra-Fredericks, 2004).

Having these four distinctive features enabled SaP research to engage closely with the minute, mundane, formal and informal activities of people when going about their work. SaP studies also seek to understand the constraining and enabling conditions under which strategizing praxis takes place, whilst not forgoing the possibility for managers to manoeuvre such conditions. In other words, the SaP research agenda is concerned with strategizing as the relationship between social structure and agency. As this body of research grows larger, it has the potential to inform practicing managers to understand how and when to include or exclude certain organisational actors in the strategizing process.

Table 2-3 SaP and related traditions (Vaara and Whittington, 2012, p.319)

	Strategy Process	Micro-Foundations	Macro-institutional theory	Institutional work	Strategy as practice
Empirical focus Structure/agency Process/outcome	Focus on individual, organisational, and team level phenomena	Focus on micro-level decision-making and strategies	Focus on inter-organisational fields and practices	Focus on individuals' activity in creating, maintaining, and changing institutions	Focus on organisational and institutional practices that enable and constrain action
	Emphasis on managerial agency	Emphasis on agency in terms of individual decisions and actions	Emphasis on institutions as powerful structures	Emphasis on creative and transformative capacity of individuals	Emphasis on practices as mediating between structure and agency
	How managerial processes contribute to organisational performance	How behaviours and decisions impact organisational performance	How institutions develop and structure behaviour	How institutional continuity and change rely on institutional work	How institutionalised practices are both shapers and outcomes of activity

2.4.3 SaP literature, Jarzabkowski and Spee's (2009) review

Over the last fifteen years, the SaP field has attracted a large number of theoretical and empirical studies (cf. Golsorkhi et al., 2010; Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009; Vaara and Whittington, 2012). Two comprehensive literature reviews were published in premium academic outlets (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009; Vaara and Whittington, 2012). The first review (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009) offers a useful framework, albeit with some issues, to classify SaP studies according to their unit and level of analysis. I use this framework to identify SaP empirical research that shares similar interests with the present study. The more recent review (Vaara and Whittington, 2012) suggests five possible future research avenues to advance the SaP agenda. Examining these directions reveals an agenda preoccupied with strategy-formulation, instead of including all work related to strategy.

Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) build on two elements; practitioners and praxis, to map empirical and theoretical studies within the SaP field. The result is nine analytical domains of research presented in Figure 2-4 (p.57). The authors warn that their typology should not be interpreted as mutually exclusive classifications because empirical studies are very likely to fit into more than one domain, and I return to this critical point later on at the end of this heading. They argue, however, that this theoretical categorisation is useful because it exposes common research interests within each domain (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009).

Research Domain A includes six studies that investigate individual practitioners and their immediate praxis (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). It includes empirical studies looking at practitioners' identities (Beech and Johnson,

2005) and their behaviours within strategy-making processes (Bourque and Johnson, 2008; Samra-Fredericks, 2003, 2005), and how the praxis of actors are influenced by the wider organisational context (Mantere, 2005, 2008). The close review of the six empirical papers in this domain exposes a preoccupation with top and middle managers at the expense of other organisational actors.

Research Domain B investigates the links between individual actors and the organisational context (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). Generally speaking, the three empirical papers (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2003; Rouleau, 2005; Stensaker and Falkenberg, 2007) in this domain examine the interactions between individuals as their unit of analysis. Equally, these papers also conclude with outcomes that relate to the connection between what actors do and what is going on at the organisational level (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009, p.76). Additionally, the three studies rely either on discourse analysis or on sensemaking as a theoretical lens to investigate the links between the micro and the meso.

Figure 2-4 Jarzabkowski and Spee’s typology (2009, p.47)

Level of praxis	macro	C	F	I
	meso	B	E	H
	micro	A	D	G
		individual actor within organisation	aggregate actor within organisation	extra- organisational aggregate actor
Type of Practitioner				

To complement and update Jarzabkowski and Spee’s (2009) review, a supplementary literature (between 2008 and 2013) survey was carried out for this research using the same methodology described by the authors (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009, p.91). Three studies (Angwin et al., 2009; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011; Suominen and Mantere, 2010) are added to the original list, and the resulting 12 studies are closely scrutinised. The close examination includes understanding the theoretical underpinnings, methodological approaches, data collection methods and the types of practitioners involved. The examination is summarised in Table 2-4 below (p.58).

Table 2-4 Comparison of 12 empirical papers studying micro or meso praxis by individual actors

Level	Paper	Theoretical Stance	Methodology	Methods	Strategic Practitioners
Meso level praxis	Rouleau (2005)	strategic sensemaking / sensegiving and structuration theory	in-depth case study	observations, interviews and documents	middle managers
	Stensaker and Falkenberg (2007)	organisational change and sensemaking	longitudinal multiple case studies	interviews, observations and secondary information	top and middle managers, and employees at different business unites
	Maitlis and Lawrence (2003)	decision-making, organisational politics and discourse	longitudinal single case study	observations and interviews	top and middle managers in an orchestra
	Angwin et al. (2009)	3Ps framework	longitudinal multiple case studies	in-depth interviews	top managers
	Mantere (2005) Mantere (2008) Samra-Fredericks (2003) Samra-Fredericks (2005)	structuration theory ethnomethodology ethnomethodology and theory of communicative actions	comparative case studies in-depth case study	semi-structured interviews observation	top, middle managers and 'operative personnel' middle managers top managers
Micro level praxis	Bourque and Johnson (2008)	anthropology: ritual theory	longitudinal case study	interviews, video, coaching sessions and observation	middle managers
	Beech and Johnson (2005)	identity theory	comparative case studies	interviews and narratives interviews, observations and documents	
	Rouleau and Balogun (2011)	strategic sensemaking			
	Suominen and Mantere (2010)	de Certeau's consumption			

In terms of theoretical contribution, the 12 studies advanced the ability of skilful top and middle managers to shape strategizing in organisations. First, top and middle managers are described as skilful social actors (Giddens, 1984). These social actors have the ability to participate in strategizing praxis in their organisation by relying on their tacit knowledge (Rouleau, 2005), the knowledge of their particular context (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011), and by reflecting on previous experience (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2003). Second, top managers appear as the most powerful actors within organisations (Mantere, 2008; Samra-Fredericks, 2003, 2005). However, middle managers have an important role in interpreting (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011) explaining (Suominen and Mantere, 2010) and championing (Mantere, 2005) strategic change. Middle managers' active involvement in strategizing is particularly present when scholars explain how identical strategic directions trigger different responses and actions from different middle managers (Rouleau, 2005; Stensaker and Falkenberg, 2007). Third, of special interest appears the performativity of the actions taken by managers (Cabantous and Gond, 2011) in terms of successful strategizing (Mantere, 2005, 2008) or strategic failure (Bourque and Johnson, 2008; Maitlis and Lawrence, 2003).

Indeed, middle and top managers are able to play political games (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2003), take different identities (Beech and Johnson, 2005), interpret strategic change (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011), construct a suitable discourse (Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Suominen and Mantere, 2010) and sell strategic change to stakeholders (Rouleau, 2005). Finally, all studies but one focused on one level within the organisation. The exception study (Stensaker and

Falkenberg, 2007) distinguished strategizing action taken at the centre of the organisation from those taken at the periphery.

Examining these 12 studies exposes three methodological similarities. First, a sociological theory (such as: de Certeau, 1984; Garfinkel, 1967; Giddens, 1984) is adopted to investigate strategizing of individual actors (Vaara and Whittington, 2012), shifting the focus to the managerial agency of actors. Second, case study is the prevailing research methodology. This research strategy permits close proximity to the actors and what they do (Balogun et al., 2003). Third, there is a shared assumption that middle and top managers are *the* main strategic actors within organisations (Angwin et al., 2009; Bourque and Johnson, 2008; Rouleau, 2005).

Jarzabkowski and Spee's (2009) work is widely cited, and was helpful as a starting point to examine the SaP literature. However, the usage of this taxonomy is not unproblematic. Indeed, the authors warned from treating it as a clear-cut classification of SaP studies. Moreover, SaP are often implicit about the 'level' of analysis. Judging these implicit factors, in order to fit the taxonomy, risks misinterpretation and misrepresentation. Furthermore, many praxes actually incorporate different levels simultaneously. Attempting to classify these according to the 'main' stream jeopardies oversimplification of the studies and takes us away from embracing the complexity of social practices that lies at the very heart of practice theories.

2.4.4 Front-line managers and strategy

SaP has provided (and is still providing) rich accounts and interesting insights into middle managers' strategizing (e.g. Balogun and Johnson, 2005; Mantere, 2008; Rouleau, 2005). However, since strategy is something 'done' or performed by multiple actors (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 1996), SaP needs to go further and shed light on how lower-level managers strategize. Despite the many calls to investigate: the new set of strategic skills needed for front-line managers (Whittington et al., 2006); how lower level managers engage with strategy (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1994); how they consume (Suominen and Mantere, 2010) and influence strategy (Balogun et al., 2003); and the role of lower rank organisation members in the strategy (Sminia and de Rond, 2012), we are still uninformed about how front-line managers (FLMs) strategize, and therefore how they enact the organisation's strategy in their day-to-day work. On rare occasions, SaP studies mentioned in passing collecting data from lower-level managers, such as: operational-level managers (Mantere, 2005), project managers (Mirabeau and Maguire, 2014) and non-strategy-managers (Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007). However, such studies do not focus on lower-level managers but include data collected from these actors in the data analysis. The present research addresses this gap in the literature.

SaP remains mute on how FLMs strategize. However, two studies look at how business unit managers at the peripheries (middle or top managers) engage with the organisation's strategy. These two studies are of interest because they examine how middle managers strategize *vis a vis* a central organisational strategy; a setting similar to the present research. These two studies are Stensaker and Falkenberg (2007) and Regnér (2003).

Stensaker and Falkenberg (2007) draw on the work of Lozeau et al. (2002) to illustrate how business unit managers make sense of strategic change over time. This sensemaking develops over time and results mostly in managers altering aspects of the original strategic plan prepared by the holding company in a way that preserves the overall aim of the planned change. The authors (Stensaker and Falkenberg, 2007) argue that ambiguity in strategic directions is the reason for this 'customisation' of the overall plan. In other words, when the change is clear, individuals do not engage in the customisation process.

Regnér (2003) examines strategizing activities of business unit managers, reporting a tension between the centre and the peripheries. He (Regnér, 2003) reports inductive strategy practices when formulating strategies in the business units of multinational companies. These inductive practices are externally focused; tend to explore new markets; and are based on observation and experience. Strategizing practices in the organisation centre, on the other hand, is more focused on industry analysis and exploiting current core competencies. Hence, business unit managers in these multinational business units engage in trial and error, and experimenting as part of their strategizing practices (Regnér, 2003).

FLMs appear in two main streams in the wider strategic management literature. On one hand, a small literature about strategy implementation (Alexander, 1991; Dess and Davis, 1984; Edwards and Peppard, 1994; Lorange, 1998; Nutt, 1998; Okumus, 2003) suggests that FLMs are responsible for executing the operational-level details of the intended organisational strategy (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992; Guth and Macmillan, 1986). This body of work generally rejects the idea that FLMs' have and enact a strategic agency, and

instead zooms in on how to get FLMs to support the planned strategic change. If the general strategy is broken down into minute and small goals, FLMs can be asked to execute these, and their performance could be judged upon attaining these goals (Alexander, 1991).

On the other hand, Burgelman (1983) in a seminal work stipulates that operational level managers at the peripheries enact an adaptive behaviour, which could initiate strategic change. For instance, these managers search for hidden resources that escaped organisational official processes, and by finding new resources, they demonstrate feasibility of a particular project (Burgelman, 1983, p.232). Miller et al. (2004) contend that previous similar experience and the organisation's readiness for change help managers to better plan and manage implementation, and in a subsequent paper Miller et al. (2008,) argue that together with CEOs, three other core organisational functions (product or service delivery, marketing and finance) are involved in both strategy-formulation and implementation. More recently, and in another unusual account, Mirabeau and Maguire (2014) illustrates how autonomous strategic behaviours of project and middle managers within the organisation could build up as an emergent strategy. Local problem solving carried out by these managers could form the origin of emergent organisation strategies (Mirabeau and Maguire, 2014).

Two operations research scholars took an interest in the ability of retail unit managers, therefore FLMs, to make business decisions that allow the retail unit to act autonomously. In a series of articles, Chang and Harrington Jr. (1998, 2000, 2002, 2003) adopt a positivist stance and quantitatively examine the impact of the centralisation of business decisions on the performance of a retail chain. They report that a centralised decision-making structure is more appropriate

when innovation opportunities are scarce (Chang and Harrington Jr., 1998), but it obstructs organisational learning from the peripheries (Chang and Harrington Jr., 2003). Equally, centralised decision-making maximises the profit of the whole retail chain at the expense of maximising opportunities surrounding local stores (Chang and Harrington Jr., 2002). Centralisation of business decisions means deploying more uniform practices, and constraining any autonomous behaviour (Chang and Harrington Jr., 2000).

Summary

Despite its shortfalls, Jarzabkowski and Spee's review (2009) provides a suitable framework (Figure 2-4, p.57) to identify SaP studies that share common research interests with the present research. In particular, empirical SaP research that studied individual managers within organisations at the "micro" and "meso" (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009, p.73) levels are considered to have similar initial research interests. Twelve studies were identified and reviewed (see Table 2-4, p.58), revealing methodological and conceptual similarities. More importantly, the review revealed an empirical gap to which this research responds. How FLMS accomplish strategizing is still an under-explored area of research.

2.4.5 SaP literature, Vaara and Whittington's review

Vaara and Whittington (2012) reviewed a large number of SaP articles that appeared in leading business journals between 2003 and 2012. The authors examined each study's empirical focus and accordingly categorised it within the 3Ps framework (practice, praxis and practitioner). Vaara and Whittington (2012) conclude by proposing five key future directions to expand the SaP research agenda. This subsection begins by summarising their review using the 3P

framework. The five future research directions are then critically exposed, illustrating a preoccupation with strategy-formulation.

Empirical studies investigating strategizing practices exemplify the complexity of multiple social interactions involved in these practices. For example, SaP research investigated practices in strategy workshops (Hodgkinson et al., 2006), artefacts (Whittington et al., 2006), discursive practices (Vaara et al., 2004), strategy tools (Moisander and Stenfors, 2009) and decision analysis techniques (Cabantous et al., 2010). There is no consensus on what defines a strategizing practice, as discussed earlier (2.4.1, p.43), due to the diverse philosophical underpinning of social practice theories (Reckwitz, 2002). Strategizing practices, encompassing both the social and the material, are said to potentially have enabling or constraining effects on strategizing in organisations (Vaara and Whittington, 2012).

Reviewing empirical studies with a focus on praxis reveals a commitment from the SaP scholar to understand what goes on inside strategy-making 'episodes' (Hendry and Seidl, 2003). Research has thus far demonstrated the importance of skills deployed by actors during strategizing praxis. For instance, Maitlis and Lawrence (2003) illustrate how strategizing failure can be caused by the lack of shared discourse amongst practitioners, Regnér (2003) discusses the differences between strategy-making praxis at the centre (a deductive process) and at the peripheries (an inductive one), whilst Ambrosini et al. (2007) stipulate that skilful managers create competitive advantage through physical arrangement. Vaara and Whittington (2012) do not classify the studies according to the level of praxis as Jarzabkowski and Spee's (2009) work does. However, an inspection of these studies (that examine strategizing praxis) reveals that most

of them address the individual or the organisational levels. Hence, SaP's main domain appears to be focused on studying individuals within the organisation, and how their actions and interactions influence the organisation's strategy.

SaP research continues to expand the definition of strategy practitioners and who should be included in this category (Vaara and Whittington, 2012). SaP brings attention to the role of strategy consultants (Nordqvist, 2012), top managers (Samra-Fredericks, 2005) and the various contributions of middle managers in the strategy process (Hoon, 2007; Mantere, 2008). However, the strategic agency of FLMS and other employees have only just started to be debated at academic conferences (Best and Balogun, 2012; Elbasha and Best, 2013). This problematizing of the strategy practitioner is promising, as it sheds light on how "strategy engagement or exclusion is achieved in diverse and often subtle ways" (Vaara and Whittington, 2012, p.309). hence, examining how lower-level managers and employees engage with strategy could be key to understanding these subtleties.

Vaara and Whittington (2012, pp.309-310) conclude their review by suggesting five key future directions to extend the field. These are: (1) founding strategic agency in a web of practices, (2) giving more weight to the macro-institutional nature of practices, (3) exploring emergence in strategy-making, (4) recognizing the role of materiality, and (5) undertaking more critical analysis.

Vaara and Whittington (2012) stipulate that research on strategy thus far stressed the capabilities of individual managers (Bourque and Johnson, 2008) to influence the organisation, giving the impression that such managers are independent actors. Future SaP research should consider organisational actors (and their practices and praxis) as they are immersed within their context by

means of placing strategic agency within a wider web of practices (Vaara and Whittington, 2012, pp.310-311). There exist various organisational discursive practices that enable and constrain strategists that can be of interest to SaP scholars (Ezzamel and Willmott, 2008; Samra-Fredericks, 2004; Vaara et al., 2004). Similarly, scholars, yet again, are invited to study the strategic agency of actors beyond middle and top management's ranks (Suominen and Mantere, 2010; Whittington, 2006). The present study fits within this first suggested research direction. The present research establishes and locates the strategic agency within a web of practice by adopting a Strong Structuration Theory (SST) approach, which pays due attention to developing a meso-level ontology and the position-practice relations (see heading 4.6.1, p.126).

The influence of strategy practices on the wider societal factors is the second proposed direction to expand SaP research. This can be achieved, Vaara and Whittington (2012) argued, by conceptualising strategic management as a social system in its own right (Whittington, 2012), and studying how strategy practices influence the wider society. For example, we can start to look at how strategy consultants' 'recipes' are participating in shaping our economies (Sturdy et al., 2006). Moreover, it is interesting to study if and how strategy, as a social concept, can travel across time and space. For instance, SaP researchers can look into whether and how western theories about strategy transpose to emerging economies (Hoskisson et al., 2000; Wright et al., 2005).

The third suggested direction calls on researchers to investigate emergent strategies (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985), and how they materialise out of patterns of actions (Mintzberg et al., 1998). Through their interest in the daily and mundane, SaP scholars have the ability to consider the informal, unplanned

patterns of actions (Beech and Johnson, 2005; Maitlis and Lawrence, 2003). Understanding the differences and the relations between the deliberate and the emergent is necessary to recognise their role in the evolution of organisations (Vaara and Whittington, 2012, p.315).

Materiality is identified as one of the three shared premises of the practice turn in social sciences (Schatzki, 2001, pp.11-12), and scrutinising the role of materiality in strategy-making is the fourth proposed direction. Here, Vaara and Whittington (2012, p.315) invite scholars to incorporate the material as an active participant in strategy-making. For instance, combinations of tools and people can be seen as specific practices, as certain technologies (Kaplan, 2011; Whittle and Mueller, 2010) can shape strategizing, and bodily position during a strategy-making meeting can influence practitioners' participation, and consequently, the outcome of that meeting (Hodgkinson and Wright, 2002).

The fifth and final direction invites researchers to capture how taken-for-granted practices condition strategy-making (Vaara and Whittington, 2012, p.316). This could be achieved, according to the authors, by problematizing such taken-for-granted assumptions in contrast to studying them as patterns leading to strategy emergence in the third future research direction. One could, for instance, study how strategic planning can legitimise short-term profit in businesses, or how inclusion in the strategy-making process affects the responsibility and accountability of non-senior managers. Capturing and critically examining the taken-for-granted should allow researchers to go further than what Vaara and Whittington (2012) work modestly suggests. This fifth suggested research direction encourages SaP not only to expose such assumptions, but also to challenge them.

Vaara and Whittington's (2012) work is different to Jarzabkowski and Spee's (2009) in that it highlights how SaP studies focus on one element of the 3Ps framework. This stimulating review (Vaara and Whittington, 2012) sets ambitious and interesting avenues for future SaP research. However, the authors (Vaara and Whittington, 2012) suggest a research agenda overwhelmingly concerned with strategy-formulation. This preoccupation with strategy-formulation stands in contrast to definitions of strategizing, which advocate a wider interest (a sample was reviewed earlier in Table 2-1, p.47). Future strategizing work should also take account of strategizing work that goes beyond strategy-making or strategy-formulation.

2.4.6 Summary

This chapter started by outlining a background on strategic management literature. This field has drawn on different theoretical underpinnings to understand the phenomena. Therefore, there is no consensus on how the term 'organisation's strategy' is used. The wider practice turn in MOS and an interest in what people actually do when strategizing, gave rise to the SaP.

The SaP research agenda is interested in the doing of strategy, meaning strategizing practices, praxis and practitioners (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006). A review of what scholars mean by 'strategizing' revealed the large and ambitious scope of the term. SaP empirical studies, therefore, provide a definition of the term derived from the aim, scope and context of that particular research- which I referred to as a context-led definition for the purpose of this research. Furthermore, the relationship between social structure and agency in the strategizing studies has received very little attention if any, revealing a

theoretical gap in the current body of literature to which the present research responds. Jarzabkowski and Spee's (2009) analytical framework and reviewing criteria are used to identify 12 SaP empirical studies that share similar empirical interests with the present study. Critical review of these studies confirms the theoretical gap identified earlier, and reveals another empirical one about the absence of research on how FLMs strategize. The present research addresses this gap. Moreover, Vaara and Whittington (2012) suggest future research directions that, upon examination, are mainly concerned with strategy-formulation. This is both unexpected and limiting since strategizing definitions declare an interest in broader strategic activities.

2.5 Structurationism

Nicolini (2012) and Chia and MacKay (2007) argue for using theories of social practice to investigate strategizing. Indeed, in *The Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice*, Golsorkhi et al. (2010) report six theoretical alternatives that could be used for studying strategizing, including structurationism, activity theory, Bourdieu's work, Foucault's work, the work of Wittgenstein, and narrative approaches. These six alternatives mirror the social practice theorists repeatedly cited as the main sources within the wider practice turn in MOS (e.g. Miettinen et al., 2009; Nicolini, 2012; Orlikowski, 2010; Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2001).

Out of the six proposed theatrical alternatives, structurationism is the best alternative to guide the present investigation for two reasons. First, structurationism has a personal appeal, creating an "ontological affinity" between the theory's and the researcher's philosophical positions (Pozzebon, 2004, p.250). Structurationism believes that "reality is grasped through day-to-day

praxis" (Giddens, 1991, p.56), and Giddens' concept of agency; having the choice to do otherwise, makes day-to-day work matter (Whittington, 2010). These core concepts strongly guide my view of the world around me. Second, the research questions investigate the interrelation between structure and agency (see 2.4.1, p.43), and structurationism is an appropriate theory to answer such questions (cf. Whittington, 2010) for the following reason. Structurationism invites scholars to pay balanced attention to both the micro sociological details and the macro institutional level (Whittington, 2010). Hence, structurationism helps researchers to study the interplay between structure and agency without privileging either side (Sminia, 2009; Stones, 2005).

The second part of this literature review chapter revisits cornerstones of ToS (Giddens, 1979, 1984, 1987, 1989, 1991) and considers its main concepts. Following that, a critical assessment of how ToS has been used to guide empirical investigations within SaP is executed. Assessing a sample of eight studies demonstrates that SaP studies adopting a structuration lens paid due attention to the agency of actors and the possibility of actions and interactions to modify structural conditions at the organisational level. The assessment also confirms the earlier theoretical gap that we remain uninformed about how the interrelation between social structure and social agency at the individual level unfolds in the strategizing practices and praxis. Complying with university' regulations, I specify that some of this second part appeared in a conference paper (Elbasha and Wright, 2012).

2.5.1 Giddens and the Theory of Structuration (ToS)

Within the field of management, ToS is cited as the main theory to drive empirical research within various disciplines, such as: management accounting (Busco, 2009; Coad and Herbert, 2009); information systems management (Jones and Karsten, 2008); organisational learning (Berends et al., 2003); knowledge management (Nonaka and Toyama, 2003); organisational communications (Haslett, 2013); marketing (Peters et al., 2009); and e-business (Chu and Smithson, 2007). Particularly, ToS is widely cited and is drawn upon within SaP literature (Balogun and Johnson, 2005; Howard-Grenville, 2007; Jarzabkowski, 2008; Kaplan, 2008; Mantere, 2008; Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007; Rouleau, 2005; Salvato, 2003; Whittington et al., 2006). Since structurationism builds upon Giddens' ToS, a review of the core concepts of the theory is presented in the next section.

What makes ToS distinctive is the 'duality of structure' notion (Kaspersen, 2000). Giddens critically confronts other social traditions finding himself struggling with the dualism in sociology (Giddens, 1979, 1984). By dualism, Giddens means the domination of either human agency or social structure on any social theory, and thus presenting them as two opposing aspects of social life (Kaspersen, 2000). Duality, on the other hand, means combining the two at the same time, emphasising their mutual dependence (Whittington, 2010). In order to clarify what Giddens means by the duality of structure, it is essential to briefly visit his ideas on conceptualisation of agents, human agency and social structures.

First, a human agent is “the overall human subject located within the corporeal time-space of the living organism” (Giddens, 1984, p.51). Human agents are knowledgeable and therefore they have the capacity to understand what they do while they are doing it. Since agents are knowledgeable, they can discursively report their reasons for acting (Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007). Agents are also able to reflexively monitor and evaluate the context of their interactions, their own conduct and the conduct of others (Giddens, 1984). Giddens (1979) claims that reflexivity enables agents to tacitly assess the relationship between the action, its reasons and its consequences.

Second, agency is the “stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporeal beings in the on-going process of events-in-the-world” (Giddens, 1979, p.75). Knowledgeable actors conduct these interventions, or actions, and produce expected and/or intended actions as well as unintended consequences (Giddens, 1989). Unintended consequences introduce a constant change in the form of unacknowledged conditions to the re-production of future actions (Giddens, 1984). Giddens insists that agency refers not only to the acting, but also to the capacity to choose to act in the first place, and to be able to ‘act otherwise’ (Giddens, 1984, p.14).

Third, Giddens debates a difference between structure, structures and social systems. Structure has a virtual existence in social practice and is “recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems” (Giddens, 1984, p.377). Structures, on the other hand, are “recursively institutionalised rule-resource sets” (Giddens, 1984, p.25). They are structuring properties that allow time-space to be bound in social systems (Giddens, 1984, p.17). Social systems “comprise the situated activities of human agents, reproduced across time and

space” (Giddens, 1984, p.25). These relationships establish organised and localised social practices. This distinction is one of type and not kind (Nicolini, 2012), describing different aspects and levels of the same concern. However, this differentiation is problematic, not only because it is vague and subtle (Stones, 2005), but also because the management and organisation studies that claim to use ToS do not implement such delicate variations (see for example Jarzabkowski, 2008; Mantere, 2005; Salvato, 2003).

The duality of structure stresses the interdependency between structure and agency; “the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize” (Giddens, 1984, p.25). Agents draw upon structures in their conduct, and this ‘drawing upon’ involves reflexivity and knowledgeability of structural context which they engage with (Giddens, 1989). Giddens analytically divides this knowledge of structures to three dimensions: domination/power, signification/meanings and legitimation/norms (Giddens, 1984, p.29). To complicate things further, Giddens sometimes uses the term ‘resources’ to refer to the structure of dominations, and the term ‘rules’ to refer to both the structure of signification and the structure of legitimation (Stones, 2005). Hence, ToS refers to agents drawing upon ‘rules and resources’ (Giddens, 1984, p.298), which can mean either structure when they are in isolation, or structures when they are in sets (Giddens, 1984, p.377). Given this ambiguity, ToS has received many critiques about the conceptualisation of structure (cf. Archer, 1995; Cohen, 1989; Parker, 2000; Thrift, 1985).

In terms of empirical applications, Giddens stresses that “structuration theory will not be of much value if it does not help to illuminate problems of empirical research” (Giddens, 1984, p.XXIX). Indeed, many researchers claim to

employ ToS in their empirical research. However, these claims are based on adopting an approximate notion of structuration and combining concepts from ToS with other theoretical traditions, rather than embracing the duality of structure as a philosophical underpinning. This will be evidenced in the next section by means of inspecting how some SaP papers engage empirically with ToS.

2.5.2 Theory of Structuration and Strategy as Practice research

In order to exemplify the use of ToS within SaP, this research will now turn to a list of eight empirical studies compiled by Whittington (2010, p.119). Whittington was one of the first scholars to call for using ToS in strategic management (Whittington, 1988, 1992). He was also one of the first to call for and present a 'practice' approach to strategy (Whittington, 1996).

The eight exemplar studies are assessed by answering two questions. First, does the paper use ToS as it appeared in Giddens' writings, or does it depend on a further development of that theory. Second, how explicit are these studies about their definitions of social structure, social agency and the relation thereof. Table 2-5 (p.77) offers a list of these studies and a summary of this critical assessment.

Visiting each of the eight papers separately is necessary to substantiate that: 1) ToS is almost always complemented with other theoretical stance to carry out empirical SaP studies and 2) studies that claimed to use ToS seem to privilege the examination of social agency, and how such agency is able to transform or sustain established structures. Moreover, it becomes clear that these studies do not sufficiently address the interrelationship between structure and

agency at the individual level, and how it unfolds over time in strategizing practices and praxis.

Balogun and Johnson (2005) position their study within the sensemaking literature, emphasising the role of agency over social structure which portrayed as directions from top management; and to be rigid and embedded in the management's desire for strategic change. They (Balogun and Johnson, 2005) describe a process where sensemaking at the intersubjective level is accredited with structuring the structural context reporting a pattern "similar to the structuration process of institutionalization proposed by Barley and Tolbert (1997)" (Balogun and Johnson, 2005, p.1588). The paper exposes a generic structuration process at the organisational level, but falls short of unpicking the structuration process at the individual level and thus answering questions like: how dose previous individual experience affects the sensemaking process?.

Table 2-5 Summary of reviewing the empirical articles in Whittington's (2010) list

Paper	Structuration(- like) theory and any additional theory	Structuration inspired insights	Main unit of analysis
Balogun and Johnson (2005)	Barley and Tolbert (1997)	Intended and unintended consequences of actions emerge from a cyclical sensemaking process	Sensemaking processes of middle managers
Howard-Grenville (2007)	Issue selling, Feldman (2004), and Barley and Tolbert (1997)	Issue selling moves draw on and reconstruct personal schemas	Issue selling practices of managers
Jarzabkowski (2008)	Giddens (1984), and Barley and Tolbert (1997)	Different strategizing behaviours have multiple consequences on altering or supporting established institutional structures	Strategizing behaviours of top managers
Kaplan (2008)	Mainly Goffman (1974), but also Orlikowski (2000)	Cognitive frames are both constraints and resources for individuals' scope of action. They shape strategizing practices and its outcomes	Interactions of individuals in the strategizing process
Mantere (2008)	Floyd and Wooldridge (1992), and Giddens (1984)	Middle managers' agency is constrained and enabled by expectations (the structural contexts they draw upon)	Middle managers' activities
Paroutis and Pettigrew (2007)	Jarzabkowski (2004), and Orlikowski (2002)	Change and continuity during strategizing processes are achieved through adaptive and recursive activities	Strategizing activities of different strategy teams
Rouleau (2005)	Sensemaking and sensegiving, and Giddens (1984)	Managers rely on structural elements to sell change to external actors, and by doing so they reproduce these structural elements	Routines and conversations carried out by middle managers
Salvato (2003)	Dynamic capabilities, and Sewell Jr. (1992)	Adaptive organisations engage in the restructuring of their organisational structures	Routines in long-term strategic change processes

Table 2-5 continued

Paper	Social Structure(s)	Social agency	The relation between them
Balogun and Johnson (2005)	Shared meanings and interpretive schemas	Not explicitly articulated, can be interpreted as managers' understandings of, reacting and responding to a change plan	A sensemaking process between individuals, generic subjective at intersubjective level
Howard-Grenville (2007)	Not explicitly articulated, seem implicit in the schemas of issue recipients	Not explicitly articulated, but seems implicit in the moves of issue sellers	Issue-sellers' moves change the issue-recipients' schemas
Jarzabkowski (2008)	An independent historical accumulation of beliefs, norms and interests	Not explicitly articulated, but can be interpreted as the actions of the organisational actors in the institutionalisation process	Behavioural regularities to modify and sustain institutional guidelines
Kaplan (2008)	Not explicitly articulated, but referred to when talking about individual and collective cognitive frames	Not explicitly articulated, but can be interpreted as the actions and interactions of the organisational actors	Not explicitly articulated
Mantere (2008)	role expectations	Actors' purposive actions, which are able to transform the conditions	Not explicitly articulated, vaguely present in how strategic agency can alter role expectations
Paroutis and Pettigrew (2007)	Not explicitly articulated	Not explicitly articulated, but seems implicit in the actions and interactions of strategy teams	Not explicitly articulated
Rouleau (2005)	Tacit knowledge and macro sociocultural structures	Not explicitly articulated, seems implicit in actor's ability to conduct sensemaking and sensegiving	Not explicitly articulated
Salvato (2003)	A stable and historical set of routines and repeated behaviours	The ability of managers to perform and change a particular routine	Not explicitly articulated

Howard-Grenville (2007) borrows the notion of power from ToS and draws on Feldman's (2004) framework to investigate the interplay between power, meaning and action. Howard-Grenville (2007) also uses Barley and Tolbert's (1997) structuration approach to analyse her data and make sense of the findings over time. However, her primary focus is on how agents, as issue-sellers, consciously make moves, and enact agency to influence the schemas, or the shared structure, of the issue-recipients. The authors' analysis is concerned of how agents are able or unable to create successful outcome based on their knowledge of their context. The paper falls short from discussing how the agent's experience is internalised and drawn upon, or how do they capture the knowledge of their context.

Jarzabkowski's (2008) study is unique to a certain extent. This is because the author details how ToS influenced the research questions, the coding and the analysis of the dataset. Jarzabkowski adopts Barley and Tolbert's (1997) theoretical framework to make sense of the data over time. Jarzabkowski studies the interplay between agent/agency and structure(s), concluding with outcomes that relate directly to that interplay. These findings, nonetheless, still describe how agency can be more or less successful in changing the existing structures at the organisational level.

Kaplan (2008) builds on Goffman's frame analysis and takes a practice approach to develop a model explaining how actors' cognitive frames are transformed into an organisational 'structure' through their practice. Kaplan's emphasis is therefore on the agent; and how her actions and interactions either becomes dominant or disturbs a pre-established, politically influenced wider social system. Hence, she calls upon the notion of power in the knowledgeable

actor from Giddens, highlighting the use of power in transforming the standing social system.

Mantere (2008) argues that despite Giddens' and Bourdieu's claims of human agency, roles still exist as external and limiting objects in organisations. However, he focuses on complementing organisational roles (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992) with human agency (Giddens, 1984). Mantere relies heavily on Giddens' conception of agency, and the agent as a knowledgeable and reflexive actor, to achieve his goal. By combining the two perspectives, the author offers a view where agency and structures interact and respond to each other. As with other studies, the discussion of such interaction remains abstract, and lacks details of how it unfolds at the individual level.

Paroutis and Pettigrew (2007) investigate the strategizing activities among teams in a large organisation. They describe these activities as having the duality of recursiveness and adaptation (Jarzabkowski, 2004). The authors draw on Giddens to explain the recursiveness of actions, referring to the agent's search for ontological security. Another reference to Giddens is in the methodology section, where Paroutis and Pettigrew (2007) justify the use of interviews as a reliable source of data because agents are knowledgeable and they are able to report discursively on the reasons behind their actions. The paper rests mute on the relationship between social structure(s) and agency.

Rouleau (2005) views sensegiving and sensemaking activities through a structuration lens. In particular, she draws on the notions of the knowledgeable actor and practical knowledge in the conduct of routinized activities. Rouleau reports: "strategic sensemaking and sensegiving are thus built from a reflexive monitoring of conduct (Giddens, 1984) that comes from the practical

consciousness of reaction to circumstances” (Rouleau, 2005, p.1431). The author does not discuss structuration as the interplay between agency and structure. In this sense, Rouleau picks concepts from ToS that relate directly to the agent and agency, and how agents draw on sociocultural structures in their sensemaking and sensegiving practices.

Finally, Salvato (2003) discusses routines as recursive activities. His main theoretical framework comes from evolution theory and the dynamic capabilities theory. Routines, within this framework, allow agents to alter organisational structures, which are historically established. He reports findings on how ‘core micro strategies’ are recursively used to support strategic initiatives and achieve successful change. Actors choose the most effective routines to create organisational-level adaptability. However, we are still unclear about what exactly drives this individual-level choice.

Summary

The eight studies share a strong commitment to understanding strategizing practices carried out by middle managers. The studies employed a combination of data collection methods that place the researchers closer to the actions and interactions of managers, including shadowing; interviewing; document analysis; and observations (e.g. Jarzabkowski, 2008; Mantere, 2008; Rouleau, 2005). However, it is evident that each of the eight studies had to rely on a second source of theory to complement ToS (Giddens, 1979, 1984) and complete the empirical investigation. None of the eight studies uses Giddens’ original ToS as it appears in his writing (Giddens, 1979, 1984). Scholars seem to selectively single out concepts from the ToS to use in their work. Three other ‘structuration-like’ (Sminia, 2009) complementary theories have been identified in

the sample: Barley and Tolbert's institutional ToS (1997), Feldman's routinized ToS (2000, 2004) and Orlikowski's practice-oriented ToS (2000, 2002). ToS is perhaps rightly seen as a pool of concepts from which researchers pick-and-choose as is seen appropriate for their research, or what den Hond et al's. (2012) characterise as Giddens *à la carte*, as illustrated in the exemplar eight studies.

Furthermore, these studies focus largely on the agency of actors; and the ability of agents to change or reinforce existing social systems at the organisational level. Consequently, when using ToS, SaP research has thus far turned a blind eye on how structure and agency interrelate at the individual level in the process of strategizing practices and praxis. The present study addresses this gap.

2.6 Chapter summary

This chapter situated the SaP research stream within the wider strategic management literature. Academic literature on strategic management can be presented as several schools of thought. These schools are usually distinctive in the way strategy is seen and how we learn about it. More recently, a turn to practice in social sciences and in management and organisation studies impacted strategic management research, and gave rise to the SaP research movement. This umbrella construct gathers scholars who share an interest in strategizing practices, praxis and practitioners.

The review of SaP literature revealed that strategizing research is currently prioritising the examination of strategy formulation. This is disappointing since strategizing, by definition, reaches a wider range of strategy-related work. The review also uncovered the lack of studies examining how FLMs strategize, an

empirical gap to which the present study responds. Examining how current literature defines strategizing exposes a theoretical gap: we are uninformed about how the relation between structure and agency develops and unfolds in the course of strategizing practices and praxis.

A structurationist stance is justified as a suitable approach to explore FLMS strategizing for two reasons. Structurationism has a personal appeal and fits closely with my philosophical position, and further advocates studying the interplay between structure and agency without privileging either side. A review of some principle concepts in ToS as they appear in Giddens' work (1979, 1984) offered a starting point to understand how ToS has been mobilised in SaP research. An exemplary sample of SaP empirical studies that mobilise ToS was critically scrutinized. These empirical studies complement ToS with another theoretical stance, and use a development of ToS. Furthermore, these studies provided interesting insights into the ability of social actors to challenge and alter existing structures. However, they fall short of informing us about how structure and agency interrelate in the process of strategizing at the individual level.

This chapter has set the academic background to the present research, and exposed the empirical and theoretical gaps addressed by the present study. The next chapter introduces Optica, the organisation where data collection activities took place.

Chapter Three – Optica, The research context

3.1 Overview of the chapter

This short chapter introduces Optica (pseudonym), the organisation in which data collection activities were carried out. The chapter helps the reader to establish a background to the results reported in the Findings chapter. Further, the discussion of Optica here highlights characteristics shared with other organisations. These characteristics set the grounds for the restricted generalizability drawn from the present research.

This chapter starts by offering a short introduction to the optical retail industry in the UK generally, and more specifically to Optica. The chapter privileges two points. First, the different types of social actors within the wider setting are discussed to bring appreciation to the different position-practices in the immediate and far context. Second, Optica's structural arrangement is common with the retail sector generally, which results in FLMS being physically located away from the centre. Store managers operate with minimum supervision and in direct contact with the final customer. Finally, issues around gaining and maintaining access are discussed.

3.2 The industry

In the United Kingdom (UK), the Optician Act 1958 established the General Optical Council (GOC) and tasked it with the power to recognise three types of qualified practitioner through a register (Fulop and Warren, 1993). These three types are ophthalmologist; or ophthalmic medical practitioners, optometrists; qualified to examine the eye and dispense spectacles, and dispensing opticians;

qualified to dispense and produce optical appliances according to prescriptions written by the other two types.

The industry was deregulated between 1984 and 1989. This deregulation included radical changes such as lifting a ban on advertising, phasing out the universal free eye examination, and abolishing the free National Health Service (NHS) spectacles. Most importantly, unqualified persons were permitted to dispense spectacles as long as they operate under the general supervision of a qualified practitioner. As a result, prices and fees of these products and services are nowadays set by the optical retailer, be it a large company or an individual shop, and not by a government regulator. This deregulation also, indirectly, gave more power to two professional representative bodies to establish and impose professional standards. These are the Association of Optometrists and the Association of British Dispensing Opticians.

Industry studies report a high concentration of optical retailers within the industry with 54% of the total market shared among four high street optical retailers. The leader in this group of four companies occupies 23% of the market and the other three owns between 6% and 11% of it. In addition to these retail chains, independent stores serve 41% of customers. Since the law requires the presence and supervision of a qualified practitioner in all optical retail outlets, independent stores are owned and operated by qualified practitioners. Lastly, UK supermarkets, such as TESCO and ASDA, are diversifying into optical retailing and building up market share quickly, offering ocular services to their existing customers.

3.3 Optica

Optica (a pseudonym) is a British, store-based, optical goods and ocular services retailer (referred to as 'optical retailer' in this thesis) owned by a major European specialised retail group (a holding company). By the end of 2011, Optica's turnover was 196 million pounds, with a healthy net profit of over 14 million. At the time of data collection, Optica employed 2750 person and operated over 300 outlets (stores) throughout the UK, Republic of Ireland and Jersey. As mentioned earlier, optical retailers offer professional and commercial services concurrently. Examples of professional services provided include: eye examinations, examining suitability for contact lenses, fitting of spectacles for young children, and fitting of safety spectacles. Examples of commercial services provided are ordering contact lenses, marketing and selling branded and non-branded frames, marketing and selling different brands and types of lenses to improve vision acuity. To cover this broad spectrum of tasks, Optica recruits different categories of employees.

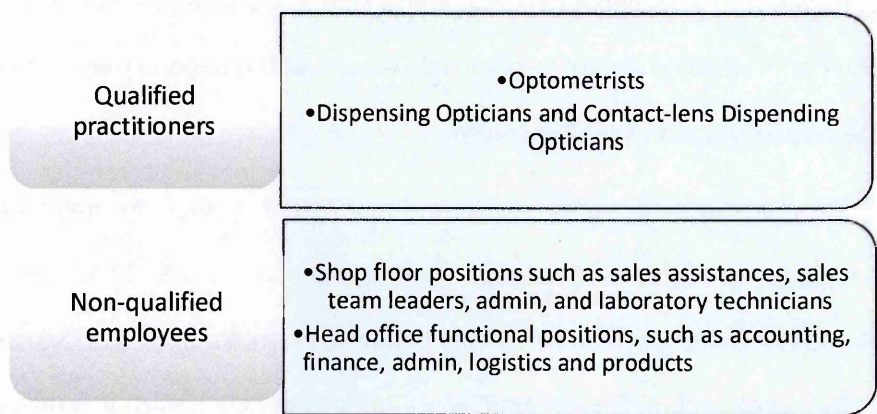
3.3.1 Employees

Optica, and any other UK optical retailer, employs two broad categories of employees; qualified practitioners and non-qualified employees (Figure 3-1, p.87).

Concerning qualified practitioners, Optica recruits optometrists and dispensing opticians. The third type of qualified practitioners recognised by the GOC (ophthalmologist) works solely in hospitals. Optometrists test visual acuity and perform medical assessments on patients' eyes. Dispensing opticians are trained and qualified to dispense spectacles to patients. Qualified practitioners

attend a full-time study program of two to three years, followed by a year or more of supervised practice, known as the pre-registration period. At the end of their practice period, qualified practitioners must pass final practical assessments before being allowed to practice on their own. On successful completion, they are required to register with the GOC in addition to their respective professional association.

Figure 3-1 Two Types of Employees in Optica



In addition to qualified practitioners, Optica recruits non-qualified staff. These include sales assistants, administrative staff and the majority of head office staff. Within stores, non-qualified staff operates under the guidance of qualified practitioners.

Managerial positions, especially store managers, are usually held by either non-qualified staff or dispensing opticians. Optometrists are generously remunerated, and rarely seek career development into managerial positions with a retail chain. Optometrists wanting to take on more responsibilities and progress

to a management position usually run their own practice as a small business, either independently or as a joint-venture partner with a high street retailer's name above the store's door.

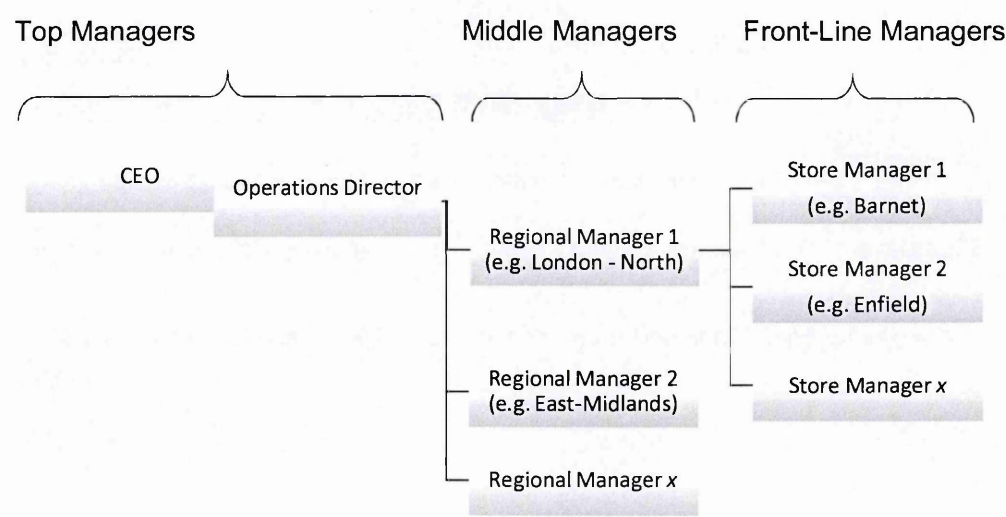
3.3.2 Organisational structure

Retail chains in the UK operate using three different models. The retail chain either: 1) owns and operates its own stores; 2) operates a joint-venture model where it owns 50% of the store; or 3) uses a hybrid of both models to operate. The final customer is, of course, unaware of these differences. Optica operates a hybrid model whereby some stores are owned and operated by the company, while other stores are jointly owned with a second party who assumes the day-to-day running of the store.

Joint-venture store partners have great power in negotiating their suppliers, products and internal management structure. These joint-venture stores are better seen as small-size businesses, rather than outlets managed by FLMS employed by Optica. Studying strategizing activities of this group of store managers could be potentially interesting, but lies outside the scope of this study. The present study includes only stores owned and operated by Optica. These stores are organised in a multi-unit organisational form (Chang and Harrington Jr., 2000). Multi-unit organisations, such as store-based retailers and restaurant chains, share a distinctive structure; which comprises one head office and many geographically dispersed outlets (Chang and Harrington Jr., 2000, 2002; Garvin and Levesque, 2008). Outlets, or stores, are aggregated into geographical regions for management purposes (Figure 3-2, p.89).

Optica is a typical multi-unit organisation with 13 regions at the time of data collection. The vast majority of employees in multi-unit organisations operate in the stores away from the head office, middle managers and the top management team. Therefore, Front-Line Managers (FLMs), or store managers, play a pivotal role in this structure. FLMs are the first level of management who practice mainly business-related skills rather than performing functional tasks (MacNeil, 2003), and to whom non-managerial employees report (Hales, 2005, p.473). FLMs are generally believed to be able to “influence both strategic and operational organisational priorities” (MacNeil, 2003, p.294). Examining these peripheral, non-senior managerial ranks provides a valuable opportunity to understand whether and how these junior managers count as strategic actors.

Figure 3-2 Part of Optica’s Structure - Operations

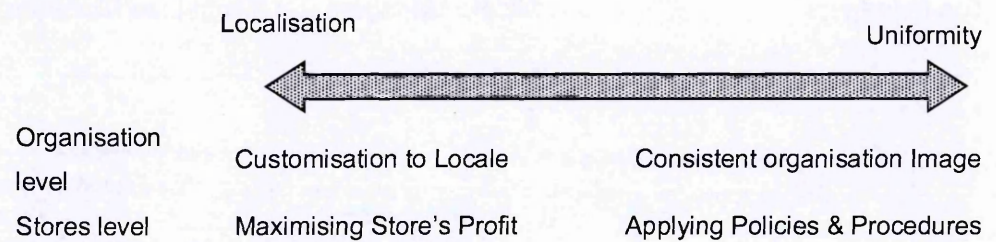


Within the research settings, store managers are the FLMs in Optica. FLMs are responsible for overseeing and managing the delivery of products

(spectacles, sunglasses and contact lenses) and services (eye examination and contact lens fitting) to customers (Hales, 2005). The store's performance is considered a proxy for the performance of its manager (Levy and Weitz, 2006). FLMs are promoted, rewarded and penalised based on the results achieved by their stores (Varley and Rafiq, 2003).

In multi-unit retailing, there exists a tension between the centre and the periphery (Chang and Harrington Jr., 2002). This tension is a result of the organisational structure, where the operations take place away from the head office (Chang and Harrington Jr., 2003). A summary of this tension is presented in Figure 3-3 below. I label the push for organisation-wide consistency 'uniformity' and the need to adapt to the local business environment 'localisation'.

Figure 3-3 The Tension between Locality and Uniformity in Optica



Developed from Chang and Harrington Jr. (2000, 2002) and Garvin and Levesque (2008)

At the store level, FLMs face a potential conflict of interest; they must act in a way that maximises the store's profit margins and, at the same time, they must implement certain organisational practices to maintain overall

organisational profit and consistency (Chang and Harrington Jr., 2000). This conflict of interest transcends another tension at the organisational level (Chang and Harrington Jr., 2002). Optica, and any other multi-unit retailer, continuously struggles to strike the right balance between achieving an organisational consistency amongst a large number of stores, on one hand, and retaining the necessary autonomy stores need to respond to their local environment on the other hand (Chang and Harrington Jr., 2002; Garvin and Levesque, 2008).

3.4 *Why Optica*

Optica is a desirable setting to conduct the research, and to answer the research questions for four main reasons. First, Optica is an interesting case (Flyvbjerg, 2006) since its stores are located in different locales necessitating some degree of localisation of apparently uniform products and services, and FLMs are responsible for carrying out this localisation. Therefore, conducting the study in Optica affords an opportunity to explore strategizing at organisational peripheries, which are physically situated away from the head office and the senior management team. In this setting, FLMs operate with a degree of autonomy, which favours detecting any strategic agency they might possess. It also means that structural context is more 'explicit' in some ways: in order to provide guide to the different stores, Optica should formalise some of these structures in order to move them across space. Second, Optica's multi-unit structure is common to many modern retail organisations, which means that the potential transferability of the present research is greater (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Third, previous work experience with the company meant that negotiating high-quality access is likely to be more successful in comparison with negotiating access to other multi-unit retail organisations (Buchanan et al., 1988). This was

an essential point since gaining access to roam across and within stores of a retail chain is a quite difficult task. Equally, prior understanding of the research setting is desirable in qualitative research (Saunders et al., 2006). Finally, the dynamic high street retail industry is underrepresented in current SaP literature (see Golsorkhi et al., 2010), and having access to Optica could potentially provide novel and/or interesting insights about social structures and managerial agency.

3.5 Getting into Optica and getting on with data collection

Initial access was granted for a pilot study in 2009. This initial access was agreed with a regional manager (Isaac), who had consulted the senior management team. A year later and at the end of 2010, another round of negotiation took place with the same regional manager (Isaac). This new negotiation was more substantial and included a more detailed proposal. It was agreed to recruit up to six store managers from one region for a longitudinal, in-depth case study. Senior managers (in particular the Operations Director) requested an interim update after six months and that a report of the final findings be shared with them.

In 2011, a few weeks before starting the data collection activities and after recruiting five participants for this case study, Isaac was assigned to a different region. This was a result of an organisation-wide restructuring, followed by other regional structural changes and which eventually meant that the five FLMS recruited for were no longer confined to one region. Another round of negotiations took place with a different regional manager (Katie) and I was re-granted access under the same terms. Two similar restructuring exercises at the organisational level took place subsequently during the data collection period. These two

restructurings exercises were a result of changes at the top of Optica, with the arrival of a new CEO and operations director. Hence, I had to re-negotiate access once again with a third regional manager before concluding the data collection phase.

These shifting circumstances meant that the current research design had to be adaptive to the fast-changing high street retail environment. Indeed, such conditions opened opportunities to observe and ask store managers about what and how these strategic changes were affecting their day-to-day business conduct. The research design also had to be re-evaluated since initially, I intended on shadowing a number of store managers for one day per week, over a period of 12 months. This initial design influenced the need to recruit FLMS who are within a commuting distance, and limited the study's 'sample' to five to six participants. Soon, I realised that this design was not practical and almost impossible to implement in the unpredictable retail setting. Hence, the data collection protocol was quickly altered to recruit 28 participants (details in Table 4-1, p. 108).

One significant point arises here. Learning to become a qualitative researcher and dealing with ambiguity, complexity and continuous change simply cannot be taught through only textbooks and structured training (cf. Cassell et al., 2009, p.527). Debutante researchers wishing to learn about conducting qualitative research in management and organisation studies should be advised to embrace flexibility and adaptability when conducting real-time research.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter introduced Optica, the site where data collection activities took place. The chapter included rich details about the broad context of the study in terms of the industry, the different types of social actors within the settings and how Optica's organisational structure gives FLMS autonomy to conduct their day-to-day work making it an interesting case to study FLMS strategizing. Further, the choice of Optica as a suitable case to answer the research questions was justified. Finally, gaining and maintaining access to Optica was not as easy as expected. The difficulties, and how that altered my initial research plan, are reported herein, in addition to a reflection on the experience and the learning that was equally experienced. The next chapter introduces the research strategy, research design and data collection methods.

Chapter Four - Research Methodology

4.1 Overview of the chapter

The literature review chapter examined SaP studies, revealing gaps in our current knowledge. Theoretically, we are still uninformed about the interrelationship between structure and agency at the individual level in the strategizing practices and praxis. Empirically, Front-Line Managers' (FLMs) strategizing is an under researched phenomena. In the previous chapter, Optica is argued to be a suitable and desirable setting under which data collection activities was carried out.

This chapter explains and justifies my methodological choices in the course of the present study, which is divided into four broad parts. The first includes three sections (4.2, 4.3 and 4.4), and introduces the research design and data collection methods. The second (section 4.6) introduces Stones' Strong Structuration Theory (SST). The third (4.7) presents the data analysis process, and the fourth addresses two overarching topics: reflexivity (4.9) and establishing trustworthiness (4.10).

Cresswell (2009, p.5) proposes three pillars for research design, these are: knowledge claims (or philosophical position), strategies of inquiry and methods of data collection. The first section (4.2, p. 97) of this chapter elucidates my philosophical stance and how it aligns with structurationism. The second section (4.3, p.100) justifies the choice of a case study approach as a research strategy to answer the research questions. It also clarifies my previous working relationship with the organisation and my awareness of ethical issues, before

introducing the research participants. The third section (4.4, p.110) details data collection methods: interviews, non-participant observations and documents.

The fourth section (4.6, p.124) introduces Strong Structuration Theory (SST). It explicates the four elements in the structuration cycle (external structures, internal structures, active agency and outcomes) as well as discussing position-practices and position-practices relations; all being founding concepts in the theory. Differences between ToS and SST are exposed and a summary thereof is provided (Table 4-5, p.133). This section concludes with a discussion of the advantages and the challenges in operationalising SST, with a special attention to how SST theatrical concepts were identified in field data.

The fifth section of this chapter (4.7, p.136) presents the data analysis. Strong Structuration Theory (SST) provides general guidance to analyse the data. In the present research, a preoccupation with searching for institutional-individual links in the day-to-day work of store managers drove this analysis process. Before detailing the process, means by which the field data was prepared and the coding technique used are offered. Following this, the four-stages of the data analysis are presented whilst relating them to the constant movement between data and theory, on the one hand, and between conduct and context analysis, on the other.

In the last two sections of this chapter, the role of reflexivity (4.9, p.153) and how trustworthiness was established (4.10, p.155) are explained. Both topics are interweaved into every step of the research process, and have an important impact on research practices and knowledge claims that are put forward at the end of this dissertation.

4.2 Philosophical position

Creswell (2009) stipulates that the term 'philosophical position' encapsulates the researcher's views about the existence in the world (ontology) and how we learn about it (epistemology). Clarifying my philosophical position is therefore important for two reasons. First, these philosophical beliefs guided the research questions and the methodological choices (Crotty, 1998). Second, the relationship between the field data and research outcomes is of a philosophical nature, and understanding the researcher's position provides the reader with the grounds to evaluate these outcomes (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Johnson and Duberley, 2000).

Orlikowski (2010, p.23) distinguishes between three ways of engaging practice theory in empirical research, these are: practice as a phenomenon, practice as a perspective and practice as a philosophy. In the first mode, practice as a phenomenon, researchers take an empirical approach focusing on micro dynamics and try to understand what happens in practice arguing that practices matter (e.g. van de Ven and Johnson, 2006). In the second mode of engagement, practice as a perspective, researchers use practice theory to inform their analyses of social practices, claiming that practices shape reality (e.g. Orlikowski, 2000). Finally, and in the third mode of engagement, practice as philosophy, researchers make an ontological commitment where social reality is constructed through social practices, believing that practices are reality (e.g. Mol, 2003). Engaging with practice as a philosophy, Vaara and Whittington (2012) further argue, is a way to advance the SaP research agenda by facilitating a critical analysis of practices that are taken for granted. Orlikowski (2010) distinguishes between the three modes, but asserts that they are not mutually exclusive.

Indeed, she (Orlikowski, 2010) advances that making a practice-based philosophical commitment would necessarily lead to engaging with social practices through all three modes.

Influenced by a practice philosophy to conduct this present research, I believe in studying organisations through the “lived practices” of the participants (Orlikowski, 2010, p.27) and that social sciences “produce realities” (Law and Urry, 2004, p.395). Both Schatzki (2005) and Nicolini (2012) consider this practice-based position as a distinctive social ontology when compared with the alternative views of individualism and socialism (as touched upon earlier in 2.2.3, p.37). Indeed, practice theorists such as Giddens and Bourdieu, challenged the conventions on either side (Whittington, 2011). Giddens, for example, argues that social theory should pay equal attention to structure and agency (Giddens, 1984). Further, studying organisations through the lived practices of its members entails a shift from a representational epistemology towards a performative one (Orlikowski, 2010). A performative epistemology necessitates a close engagement with the research participants within their context because “knowing does not come from standing at a distance and representing, but rather from direct material engagement with the world” (Barad, 2007, p.49). Furthermore, the present research adopts a ‘dwelling’ world view, where “both individuals and societies are mutually constitutive and co-defining” (Chia and Holt, 2006). Strategy, according to this epistemology, is no longer “construed in terms of clarity of vision, of transparent purposefulness, of goal-directed action and systematic resource mobilization” (Chia and Rashe, 2010, p.44). Instead, researchers must pay attention to the “unconscious parts of strategizing and the

internalized and culturally mediated *modus operandi* that underlies strategy practices” (Chia and Rashe, 2010, p.44).

A practice philosophy lies at the heart of structurationism, because “the basic domain of study of the social sciences [is] social practices ordered across space and time.” (Giddens, 1984, p.2). Taking a structurationist position means trusting the existence of a fundamental difference between social sciences and natural sciences (Giddens, 1979). Knowledge produced in social sciences is not about an “independently constituted subject-matter, which continues regardless of what these concepts are. The ‘findings’ of the social sciences very often enter constitutively into the world they describe” (Giddens, 1987, p.20). Universal laws cannot exist in the social sciences because relationships, identified in empirical research, are dependent on the actors’ knowledgeability of the context of their conduct (Giddens, 1984; Stones, 2005). Hence, meanings, and consequently knowledge, are constructed as researchers engage (as human agents) with the phenomenon they are studying (Crotty, 1998; Stones, 2005). Following structurationism, outcomes of the present research assume participants’ knowledgeability of their context, in which they conduct their practices (Giddens, 1984, p.XXXII). Moreover, my interpretations are based on the participants’ understanding of their immediate setting.

The research methodology, the data collection methods and the knowledge claims must be coherent with the philosophical position (Creswell, 2009; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). In the subsequent pages, methodological choices, such as using case study as a research approach and collecting data using interviews and observations, are justified and linked to the philosophical

position discussed above. The Discussion chapter presents and deliberates such knowledge claims.

4.3 Research strategy

The present research was originally driven by an empirical quest to understand how FLMs accomplish strategizing work. This original aim led to the unearthing of a theoretical gap in our understanding of how the interrelation between structure and agency unfold at the individual level during strategizing. Using SST as a framing device, the four research questions are:

- What are the main external structures drawn upon by FLMs when strategizing?
- What are the main internal structures drawn upon by FLMs when strategizing?
- How does FLMs' strategic agency manifest in FLMs' day-to-day conduct?
- What are the main position-practice relations within which FLMs operate?

The present study adopted a qualitative case study approach to answer the research questions, which is justified as follows. Positivist quantitative methods and methodologies (such as large surveys) are used to test hypotheses and expose universal causalities (Johnson and Duberley, 2000, p.39). Hence, they are neither consistent with my philosophical position, nor suitable to answer the exploratory research questions. Qualitative approaches, on the other hand, can be helpful to understand participants' personal experience and to examine why and how things occur within their contexts (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Kalof et al., 2008). Qualitative approaches are also consistent with adopting

a structurationist lens to theorise from empirical data (e.g. Barley, 1986; Berends et al., 2003; Coad and Glyptis, 2014; Jarzabkowski, 2008).

From the different qualitative approaches available, the present research embraces a case study approach. A case study approach is defined as a: “strategy for doing research which includes an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence” (Robson, 2002, p.178). This approach is particularly suitable to answer the research questions for two main reasons. First, it is the recommended approach to understand the underlying dynamics between structure and agency within a single setting (Eisenhardt, 1989) and within a “real-life context” (Yin, 2003, p.1). This is especially so since understanding the complex relationship between structures and agency as it unfolds requires examining the phenomena in detail. Hence, this detailed examination is achieved through selecting and investigating a suitable case (e.g. Jarzabkowski, 2008; Rouleau, 2005). Furthermore, a case study approach is regularly employed when conducting structuration-influenced empirical studies (e.g. Ahrens and Chapman, 2007; Aldous et al., 2014; Barley, 1986; Greenhalgh and Stones, 2010; Jack and Kholeif, 2008; Mantere, 2008). Keeping the research activities within one organisation, Optica, also allowed investigating the various practices of different FLMs within a similar structural context.

The second justification for choosing a case study research strategy relates to the SaP. Scholars within this stream of research believe in being close to the case in SaP research. Employing a case study strategy therefore affords researchers to get closer to the practices and praxes of practitioners (e.g.

Balogun and Johnson, 2005; Bourque and Johnson, 2008; Howard-Grenville, 2007; Kaplan, 2008; Rouleau, 2005; Samra-Fredericks, 2005).

The case used in this research, Optica, can be regarded as descriptive and exploratory (Yin, 2003), as it describes how front-line managers strategize and explores related factors. It is also an instrumental case (Stake, 1995) seeking to expand our understanding beyond the particular case of research to similar contexts. The research approach can be further specified as an in-depth embedded single-case design (Yin, 2003, p.40) where data are collected from multiple participants in a single organisation.

4.3.1 An insider's perspective

The research activities took place in Optica, a high street, store-based, optical retailer in the UK (chapter three). Prior to the present research, I worked at Optica for four years, but ceased full-time employment before starting data collection activities. In the last year of full-time employment, I worked closely with various FLMs as an Assistant Store Manager. Previously, however, I worked in several more junior positions at different stores of various geographic locations. This personal involvement allowed a unique opportunity to get extremely close to the day-to-day work, a desirable prerequisite to study strategizing (Balogun et al., 2003). Moreover, I had received professional (medical) training outside of the UK as an optician, but I did not have the licence to practice in the UK. During fieldwork, I had employee's privileges in terms of access to the premises, meetings and internal documents.

My background as an optician, and as an employee in Optica, helped research participants to accept me as a peer, which made them more inclined to

provide good quality data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Being an 'insider' also meant that I had a prior and rich understanding of Optica (Saunders et al., 2006), a feature said to enable high quality analysis of raw data (Yin, 2003). This is particularly important in interpretive case study research, where findings are influenced by the researcher's own experience and background (Stake, 1995).

Past medical training and "prolonged engagement" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.301) also privileged me with a better understanding of the 'technical language' (Giddens, 1993, p.170) used in the industry. Technical language refers to expressions and jargon used specifically in the context of the phenomena under study, which could be misunderstood by someone who is not familiar with the context (Giddens, 1993). In Optica, technical language included business- and industry-specific terms and medical terms used on the shop floor in optical retailing. FLMs continuously refer to "CER" (Converted Exam Rate) and "DER" (Dispensed Exam Rate) when discussing their work, both being indispensable performance indicators in the industry. Additionally, medical terms were interweaved into the day-to-day work on the shop floor, such as: refraction, PD (i.e. Inter-Pupillary Distance), visual field test (always shortened to 'fields'), hard and soft contact lenses, Keratoconus, polarised lenses, executive bifocals, and many more.

However, previous engagement with the research setting could give rise to some challenges. One of the dangers is being too familiar with the locale, which could lead to "seriously misunderstanding the behaviour observed" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.87). Being too close to an interesting phenomena can also be problematic because phenomena should always be seen within its wider

contexts (Hammersley, 1993). Another challenge is becoming too friendly with participants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Previous knowledge of the setting posed another challenge during the data analysis and the writing of this dissertation. In interpreting the data, it was important to separate personal views before data collection activities, and what the data collected included. In some occasions, I had to examine my previous perspective as some research participants expressed opposing opinions, and some others had more knowledge of the larger context. I had to take the necessary steps to avoid ethnocentrism (Stoddart, 1986) by accounting to my previous knowledge and perspective.

These challenges were addressed by taking three steps. Firstly, an 'emic' approach to data analysis (Silverman, 1993) was implemented, whereby first-level codes emerged from the raw data. Secondly, methods triangulation and source triangulation (Patton, 1987; as cited in Yin, 2003) were exercised. Finally, I accounted for my prior knowledge and reflexivity by keeping an audit trail (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) in form of research memos.

4.3.2 Ethical considerations

Ethical concerns are of a great importance in this study due to my previous employment at Optica. To ensure that the research conduct was ethically acceptable, the Economic and Social Research Council ethical framework (ESRC–FRE) was followed. This particular framework was chosen for three reasons. First, it is widely used and well-respected by UK scholars. Second, a comprehensive and detailed description was found within the guidance, and third, the framework has been revised and updated periodically. Furthermore, The

Open University's ethical approval was obtained before commencing data collection (Appendix B, p.284). Two ethical issues were prominent in the present study: obtaining an informed consent and protecting the privacy and confidentiality of participants.

In terms of informed consent, Ruane's (2005) recommendations to include the following points when designing the information sheet and the consent form (both documents can be found in Appendix A, p.281) were observed. This included the purpose of the study, the researcher's background, potential benefits of participating in the study, a promise to share the findings, an indication of the level of confidentiality of the data and, most importantly, advice that participation was voluntary and that consent can be withdrawn. Further, the information sheet and the consent form were sent in advance to allow participants ample time to read and consider taking part. The documents were revisited with the participants at the beginning of field visits and my supervisor's contact details were provided should participants have any concerns regarding my conduct. Further, I remained at hand to answer queries from employees about what I do during fieldwork. Two research participants declined request to record their interviews, and three requested further details about where the results could potentially be published. In the latter case, some academic journals websites with open access articles were provided, as well as sharing an academic article with them.

In terms of protecting the privacy and confidentiality of participants, all names and locations were anonymised to enhance confidentiality. I also refrained from declaring who had accepted to participate in the research to other organisational members. Having said that, during a store visit, I found out that FLMs discussed, amongst themselves, the nature and purpose of my visits.

During the store visits and observational activities, the privacy of employees was observed, the researcher opted to withdraw from some sensitive situations. For example, during one particular visit the FLM had to speak to an employee about the loss of her grandmother and, in another, I stepped outside the office when the FLM started a heated discussion with their partner on the phone. Finally, when moving data electronically, the data was encrypted in order to protect the identity of the participants in the event the recordings or the transcripts were lost.

4.3.3 The participants

In chapter three, it was clarified that Optica is an interesting case to study how FLMs strategize because of its multi-unit structure. Chapter three also discussed how access to Optica was gained and maintained through multiple rounds of negotiations.

In August 2011 after gaining approval from Optica, I attended a Monthly Regional Meeting (MRM) to recruit the first wave of participants. MRMs are headed by a regional manager and attended by store managers who work in that region (see Figure 3-2, p.89). Each region contains, on average, 20 company-operated stores, with one store manager. Three weeks prior to the regional meeting, the 'research information sheet' and the 'consent form' (Appendix A, p.281) were emailed to the regional manager who in turn circulated them to the FLMs within the region. A 10-minute slot was allotted in the meeting to present the research and during this presentation, the original empirical research aim and the data collection protocol were reiterated, and FLMs were encouraged to pose questions. The confidentiality aspect of the research was particularly emphasised; clarifying that participation will be anonymous and no material

collected (especially interviews and observation notes) will be passed on to any other employee within the organisation. It was also stressed upon that this study is independent and was not being conducted on behalf of Optica's top managers. Out of the 12 Front-Line Managers (FLM) attending, five were successfully recruited, one of whom I had previously worked closely with.

As discussed earlier (3.5, p.92), these five managers were soon assigned to different regions after an organisation-wide restructuring exercise, and three of them changed locations and became responsible for different stores. Responding to the changes and the reality in the research setting, I swiftly decided to recruit more FLMS at the expense of spending less time with each participant. During the 12 months of fieldwork, two additional rounds of recruitment were conducted by either attending MRMs or directly contacting FLMS if their names were cited during fieldwork. The same procedure, which evolved after renegotiating access for the second time, was followed to recruit each FLM. The protocol included five main activities. Firstly, the information sheet was communicated to the FLM one to two weeks in advance of making first contact. The individual was then approached to ask if they would be interesting in taking part in the research. If agreed, a suitable date and time to visit the FLM in their store was agreed upon. During the visit, which on average lasted four-and-a-half hours, I shadowed the FLM as they went about their day-to-day job. During the store visit, I took notes as a non-participant observer (details are provided in section 4.4.2, p.117), and I conducted an interview with the participant during the visit, usually immediately after the observation (details are provided in 4.4.1, p.111).

In total, 24 FLMS participated in the research covering three different geographical regions (London, South East and Northern England). Additionally,

interviews were conducted with four middle managers, namely three regional managers and one product manager from the head office, bringing the total to 28 participants (Table 4-1 below).

Table 4-1 Participants

Participant (pseudonyms)	Length of service with Optica (years)	Position*	Professional training**	Length of experience as an FLM (years)	Age Group	Sex
Kamal	13	FLM	No	1	40s	M
Adam	9.5		No	7	40s	M
Balan	4		Yes	1	20s	M
Indy	7		No	7	40s	M
Jack	4		Yes	10	40s	M
Kiran	11		Yes	5	30s	M
Kedar	9		No	1.5	20s	M
Lahar	5		No	1.5	20s	M
Malek***	7		No	7	40s	M
Madin	3		No	6	30s	M
Sajan***	5		Yes	3	30s	M
Zain	8.5		Yes	6	30s	M
Abby	9.5		Yes	1.5	30s	F
Amanda	5		No	1.5	20s	F
Adele	20		No	12	40s	F
Carol	15		No	4	50s	F
Hiba	11		Yes	7	30s	F
Lea	17		No	8	50s	F
Laura	3.5		No	21	40s	F
Sana	10		No	2.5	30s	F
Sati***	15		No	15	30s	F
Stacy***	14		Yes	2.5	30s	F
Yeva	6		Yes	4	30s	F
Raji	12		Yes	6	30s	F
Roy	14	MM	Yes	Not Applicable	50s	M
Isaac	11		No	Not Applicable	50s	M
Katie	15		No	Not Applicable	30s	F
Sonia	17		No	Not Applicable	40s	F

* MM Middle Manager , FLM: First-line (Store) Manager

** Whether the manager obtained a professional qualification (e.g. dispensing optician) or not

*** Interviewed and visited more than one time

Participating FLMs had on average ten years of working experience with Optica (ranging from three to 17 years) with an average of 7 years of experience as a store manager (ranging from one to 21 years). 58% of participating FLMs did not have professional training, hence, they were not dispensing opticians and half of these were females.

Middle managers were recruited and interviewed for the two reasons. First, Strong Structuration Theory advocates social research to be an “investigation” or a “finding out” process (Stones, 2005, p.38). To investigate a phenomenon in ever greater detail, Stones (2005) stipulates that researchers need to collect data by different means from different participants and/or various sources at different levels. Second, collecting data from multiple sources of information, and different types of participants, is also said to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 305).

This theoretical (Eisenhardt, 1989) and purposeful (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) sampling of collective cases (Stake, 1995) aimed to maximize what we can learn from the settings; and not to put together a statistically representative sample of FLMs in Optica. These participants provided interesting and rich insights into the topic of the research (Ruane, 2005).

Following Nicolini (2012), I define the unit of analysis as the practices of FLMs meaning not only “the day-to-day stuff of management [...] what managers do and what they manage” (Johnson et al., 2003, p.15), but also how they do this day-to-day work (de Certeau, 1984).

Data were collected using non-participant observations and semi-structured interviews. Secondary data were also collected from internal and external documents.

4.4 Data collection methods

Using multiple methods to collect data in case studies is both encouraged and expected (Yin, 2003). Employing multiple methods is also common when adopting a structurationist approach (Jack and Kholeif, 2008; Jarzabkowski, 2008; Rouleau, 2005). Real-time data collection activities took place over 12 months, between August 2011 and August 2012. The collected data, however, covered a period of seven years (2005-2012). Similar to Jarzabkowski's (2008) approach, information about the first six years (2005-2011) were gathered retrospectively. Obtaining and using data that extends beyond the real-time data collection period is widely used within Management and Organisation Studies (Miller et al., 1997). Retrospective data established the historical forces (Stones, 2005) that influenced how Optica operates and the experience of those FLMS who have been employed there for a long time. For example, participants discussed some major events that had occurred in 2005 (such as the change of company ownership, and the departure of a long-standing CEO), and an internal document detailed the evolution of Optica's strategic vision over a 20 year period. Retrospective data also allowed the researcher to understand the FLMS' practices within their wider context (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Conversely, real-time data was used to examine the day-to-day work of FLMS, and provided an opportunity for the researcher to ask questions about previous events (Jarzabkowski, 2008, p.625).

Once a FLM agreed to participate in the research, a visit to their store was arranged and conducted. Four FLMs were exception to that when the researcher visited their store on more than one occasion. Table 4-2 below details these four exceptions. For example, Malek (FLM) was visited three times, twice in one store and a third time in a different store. In the case of the middle managers (three regional and one product manager), a single one-hour interview was conducted with each of them.

Table 4-2 Details of Repeated Visits to Some FLMs

<i>FLM</i>	<i>Total number of visits</i>	<i>Number of Locations</i>
Malek	3	2
Sajan	2	1
Sati	3	2
Stacy	2	2

The next three subsections explicate the data collection methods with the related justifications of each method, and detail how fieldwork was carried out. Each subsection concludes with an example.

4.4.1 Interviews

Following Mantere (2008), the interviews were semi-structured with the same core themes repeated with each interviewee. The core themes were derived from the research questions as illustrated in Table 4-3 (p. 113). Each research question but one had two core themes. These themes were established

mainly through a pilot study previously conducted in 2009 during the researcher's Master's degree, but refined during and after the first five interviews. The interview questions were open-ended, allowing each participant to express their individual experiences (Ruane, 2005); therefore their own unique understanding of their conduct and context. For instance, I asked how does the FLM communicate strategy to their team, rather than asking how an FLM in Optica is required to communicate strategy to their teams. Another example is asking FLMs who previously worked in different stores if there are any differences in the day-to-day running of the different locations.

Semi-structured interviews encouraged unanticipated and interesting responses to emerge for two reasons. First, participants responded using their own words and expressions (Kalof et al., 2008) bringing new insights and knowledge. Indeed, Alvesson (2003) stipulates that this form of interviewing is a knowledge production activity. This knowledge production is a result of the social interaction between the researcher and the participant. Hence, Kvale (2007) invites qualitative researchers to consider interviewing as an '*Inter Views*', emphasising the social interaction element in the process of interviewing. Evidence of this joint production of knowledge appeared during the data analysis, where the participant's own expressions were sometimes used to code and theme the data. For instance, one theme was labelled as 'strategy depends on what desk you sit behind', which is a direct quote taken from an interview.

**Table 4-3 Relationship Between Research Questions and Interviews
Core Themes**

<i>Research Question</i>	<i>Interview core theme</i>	<i>Some related interview questions</i>
How does FLMs' strategic agency manifest in FLMs' day-to-day conduct?	<p>If and how are store managers able to influence organisation's strategy</p> <p>What is the role of FLMs in the strategizing process in Optica?</p>	<p>Do you think FLMs have a say in Optica's strategy? Why and how?</p> <p>Can you think of an occasion where an initiative was implemented in Optica as a result of something that had been initiated earlier on the shop floor?</p>
What are the main internal structures drawn upon by FLMs when strategizing?	<p>Pervious managerial and employment experience within and outside Optica</p> <p>How the participant viewed and understood the organisational strategy</p>	<p>Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? How long have you been with Optica? How long have you been a store manager? Have you always worked in optical retailing?</p> <p>What is Optica's strategy in your opinion? Has this changed in the recent years/months? What is the source of this change?</p>
What are the main external structures drawn upon by FLMs when strategizing?	<p>FLMs' day-to-day work</p> <p>If and how the 'strategy' influences the day-to-day work in the store</p>	<p>What do you consider a typical day in the store?</p> <p>Do you think that the day-to-day work contributes to Optica's strategy? How? Why?</p> <p>Do you remember a time where you recalled this strategy when dealing with a customer or with a staff member?</p>
What are the main position-practice relations within which FLMs operate?	Other social actors/agents in the context of FLMs	Questions were derived from the interviews. For example, if a FLM talked about the regional manager, I would ask: what is the nature of the relationship between the regional managers and the FLMs?

Second, researchers using semi-structured interviews enjoy some degree of flexibility, since answers can be clarified and supplementary information can be requested or obtained (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2000). Saunders et al. (2006) believe that semi-structured interviewing technique is used in social studies to explore questions about the why, what and how of a phenomenon. This was evident when FLMs were asked to provide examples, sought clarification about an answer, or to explain a process or provide supporting statements. Furthermore, exploratory questions motivate the present research and the flexibility inherited in the semi-structured interview approach facilitated answering these motivating questions.

Roulston et al. (2003) reports that the interviewing process is not a challenge-free one and that unexpected circumstances are common. One FLM was disappointed to know that interview recording is limited to audio as she had prepared herself for a videotaped interview. Another FLM was clearly busy reading his emails during the interview, yet insisted that he was very attentive to the questions being asked and declined the suggestion to arrange an alternative date. Needless to say, this last interview was not particularly insightful for the research topic. On a third occasion, one FLM declined the request to record the interview and I resorted to taking notes. This created a problem since the FLM frequently stopped while giving responses because I was writing notes and resultantly, making less eye contact. Moreover, some of the questions asked were not as clear as they were intended to be and research participants asked for clarifications about the meaning. For instance:

The researcher: Could you please tell me what does strategy mean to you?

FLM: What like in... Optica's strategy or in general?

The researcher: Well, actually both... I am interested mainly in Optica's strategy but I would also be interested to know what the word means to you.

In this example, this part of the interview started with a broad question which was poorly re-worded and eventually led to two questions in one. Lastly, whilst the core themes were retained in mind during the interviews, keeping the interviews focused on these topics whilst allowing FLMs to speak freely was an extremely challenging task. According to Roulston et al. (2003), novice researchers frequently face these amongst other challenges. These examples emphasise a point raised earlier: learning to be a qualitative researcher is mostly done by getting on with research activities and experiential learning.

On average, interviews lasted for an hour, ranging from 40 minutes to two hours. The interviewing process benefited from Kvale's (2007) recommendations. In particular, the stage was 'set' by reiterating the purpose of the research and the interview, asking the participants if it was possible to record the interview and emphasising their right to decline answering any questions (Kvale, 2007, p.55). During the interview, information was sought by employing different questioning techniques (Kvale, 2007, pp.60-61). For example, techniques included probing (could you tell me about), asking for specifics (do you remember a time when you referred to strategy when dealing with a customer?), checking my interpretations (do you mean that staff in this store are less motivated?), and guiding the interview (can we now talk about the organisation's strategy?). Lastly, I took the time to conclude the interview by thanking participants for their time and asking if

they would like to add anything. Indeed, some of the most interesting thoughts came in these last moments (Kvale, 2007).

All but two interviews, when research participants declined the request to record the interview, were recorded and transcribed as recommended by Kvale (2007). Notes were also recorded about the main ideas and observations made during the interviews (Fontana and Frey, 2005; Kvale, 2007) to complement the recording. I personally transcribed two interviews as a mean of improving research skills (Cassell et al., 2009). The others were transcribed using a professional service. All transcriptions were examined multiple times for accuracy. Checking the accuracy of the transcripts was important because the process of transcribing is a process of selecting relevant elements of the encounter, and transforming these elements into textual form (Rouleau, 2005). By inspecting the transcripts, I was able to ensure that no relevant elements were absent. For example, in one transcript, part of the text was lacking the natural 'flow' of the conversation, with the FLM referring to "this here" and "this one there". When reviewing the recording against the interview notes, it was realised that this interview took place in the FLM's office where some documents on the desk were being referred to. Furthermore, as a non-native speaker of English the researcher struggled with some of the accents and dialect-specific expressions (Roulston et al., 2003). In such cases, the assistance of colleagues and friends was sought. Few examples can be cited here. One FLM from east London kept ending his sentences by saying 'on that', two FLMS from the North of England routinely repeated "I'm one of them people...", and I had to go back and check with one Scottish FLM about what was actually being said during the interview, since neither the professional transcriber nor I were able to understand some words.

Following Giddens (1984), interviews are considered as an important source of information because participants are knowledgeable social actors who are able to report their reasons for actions when challenged to do so (Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007). Nonetheless, numerous authors (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Walford, 2007) argue for the need to support interview data with other types of data collection methods to boost the trustworthiness of the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), especially in case study research (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003). This demonstration of quality, Roulston (2010) argues, should stem from the theoretical and epistemological assumptions about the research and the role of interviews. Indeed, structurationism invites researchers to investigate the phenomenon of interest using multiple methods of data collections (Stones, 2005).

4.4.2 Non- participant observations

Interpretations of the oral accounts, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) stipulate, must always be seen within their social context. Indeed, observing FLMs deepened the researcher's understanding in three ways. First, observing different FLMs in different stores established the wider organisational context beyond a single store. Second, non-participant observations were useful to link and compare what FLMs said during the interview to what they actually did on the shop floor (Kalof et al., 2008). Finally, non-participant observations helped the researcher to re-live the experience of being an employee, whilst having a critical distance from doing the job and therefore addressing worries of ethnocentrism (Stoddart, 1986). This enabled first-hand involvement to supplement the topics and issues raised in the interviews (Samra-Fredericks, 2005).

Non-participant observations produced around 100 pages of field notes, and took place mainly within stores during day-to-day work. Additionally, five Monthly Regional Meetings (MRM) were observed. These meeting are organised off-site (outside the stores) in a hired meeting room (Table 4-4, p.120).

First, in-store observations were conducted in a non-participant format, where I quietly shadowed the store manager whilst taking notes without actively participating in the actions they were involved with. At the beginning of each observation, FLMs were conscious of the researcher's existence and reacted in such a way (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). For example, one FLM seemed over friendly with staff and customers. After the second observation, a practice of offering FLMs and employees the opportunity to read the recorded notes within 15 to 20 minutes of starting the observation was developed. Sharing these notes established trust, and FLMs quickly became more relaxed and exhibited behaviours that were more natural. On some occasions, especially during busy hours, I found that standing at a reasonable distance was best to allow the FLM adequate space to operate more naturally. The observations were conducted to live the experiences of the participants, and collect data about their practices on the shop floor during day-to-day work. I dressed smartly and avoided the colours of the uniform used by Optica's staff on the shop floor. This resulted in the employees quickly warming up to the researcher, mentioning that dressing smartly communicated that I am doing a professional work. Further, previous experience with Optica and knowledge of the vocabularies used on the shop floor helped employees feel comfortable about my presence and inquisitiveness.

Second, five MRMs were observed. These meetings, as explained earlier, are headed by a regional manager and attended by the FLMs in the

corresponding region. These meetings, which lasted between six and eight hours, were organised at a hired venue and not in stores. Regional managers used these meetings to review performance, discuss operational issues and communicate any strategic and organisational changes. For example, during the second meeting a discussion amongst FLMS was witnessed, during which they exchanged views on how to convince their optometrists to offer contact lenses to all patients. This was important because, at the time, Optica decided to focus on growing its contact lenses market share. Convincing optometrists was essential and difficult because traditionally these medically trained professionals made a personal judgement about offering contact lenses to patients, based on some subjective criteria. Many optometrists, for instance, refrained from offering contact lenses to any patient that they believe to be 'old'.

Table 4-4 Observations schedule

Observation	Length (h:m)	Region	FLM Observed
MRM 1	08:00	R1	*
Malek 1	04:45	R1	Malek
Lahar 1	04:30	R1	Lahar
MRM 2	06:00	R1	*
Sajan 1	04:30	R1	Sajan
Sati 1	04:30	R1	Sati
Stacy	04:00	R1	Stacy
Lahar 2	04:00	R1	Lahar
Malek 2	02:00	R1	Malek
Madin	04:00	R2	Madin
MRM 3	06:30	R1	*
Balan	04:00	R2	Balan
Amanda	04:00	R2	Amanda
Indy	04:30	R2	Indy
Kiran	03:45	R1	Kiran
Sajan 2	04:30	R1	Sajan
MRM 4	05:15	R1	*
Adele	05:00	R2	Adele
Carol	04:30	R1	Carol
Sana	05:15	R3	Sana
Laura	03:30	R2	Laura
Zain	05:00	R1	Zain
MRM 5	05:00	R1	*
Yeva	04:00	R1	Yeva
Kedar	04:00	R2	Kedar
Sati 2	03:00	R3	Sati
Malek 3	02:00	R1	Malek
Abby	05:00	R3	Abby
Lea	02:00	R2	Lea

29 visits

127 hours

3 regions, 21 stores

* wide range of attendees, including FLMs, Middle Managers, the Operations Director, some assistant managers

** these took place in hired meeting rooms in a hotel

Following Angrosino (2007, p.40), notes from non-participant observations involved a degree of structure. Events were recorded in sequence, and all field notes included the following elements: date, time and place of the observation, description of the physical settings (store or meeting layout), descriptions of

behaviours and interaction, description of the participants and verbatim verbal exchanges. For instance, during a store visit the following notes were written:

Malek comes back and immediately [he is] dealing with a customer complaint, [the] FLM is dictating [to] his ASM [assistant store manager] a letter to send out to that patient, because [the] patient has refused to be contacted by [any] means other than post. Malek is also [i.e. simultaneously] opening some [training] packs from the HO. Some packs from [the] HO haven't got labels, FLM is trying to make sense why the training pack is sent and to whom does it belong. "typical", says Malek.

(Malek, FLM)

This extract shows some difficulties in keeping up with the world of FLMs as it unfolded in front of the researcher. Resultantly, some words were skipped in an attempt to record as much as possible. Furthermore, approaching the notes with some kind of structure imposed a type of order on the complex and unstructured interactions being witnessed at the time.

As mentioned before, I attempted to shadow the store managers during their work. I was trying to capture what I see and hear around me. When stores were busy, I witness the continuous movement of staff, and how the manager tried to orchestrate, or not, the flow of customers and employees. Customers were accommodating for this surge in service demand in general, but few were aggressive. Comments like: Where are my glasses? I need to leave now! I have been waiting for half an hour, is someone going to come and help me? What are you (pointing at me, the researcher) watching? Were not uncommon in these busy hours. Whether the store was busy or not, I did my best not to be involved in the actions and interactions I was witnessing. FLMs repeatedly turned to me asking

'what do you think'. In these cases, I tried to maintain my non-participant position by gently avoiding to answer 'I don't know really'. When pressed hard, I summarised the issue to the manager 'okay so let's see what we know, the customer was told it would be ready in an hour, but it is not ready yet right?'. In all situations, my priority was to minimise my intervention in their movements and actions. When participants attempted to involve me in their world and day-to-day work, it was sign that they accepted and trust me, that I blended in and 'gone native'.

4.4.3 Documents

Interviews and observations provide reflective and current accounts from participants. In contrast, documents are considered as secondary sources in management and organisation studies because of their supplementary role of providing background information (Pettigrew, 1985; Strati, 2000). In the course of the present study, collecting documents improved the researcher's understanding of certain elements in the structuration cycle. In particular, it provided data to establish some of the external structures (organisational procedures, strategy statements, job descriptions, et cetera), and some of the outcomes of structuration cycles (change or re-enforcement of established norms, change or re-enforcement of established strategic priority).

Various internal and external documents were collected consisting of over 500 pages. Internal documents were usually obtained by arranging a special visit to one of the participating stores, where access to Optica's intranet was granted. Some documents such as presentation slides were requested directly from research participants and later received by email. Maintaining that research is an

investigative process (Stones, 2005), most of the internal documents were obtained after they were cited by participants during field activities. Eventually, different types of internal documents were collected, namely:

- Strategy statements (mission, vision et cetera...) for the past 10 years;
- A 30-minute internal video documentary about how Optica's visions and strategies had evolved from the early foundation years until 2008 (covering nearly 20 years);
- Documents illustrating the operational re-structuring of Optica over the 12 months real-time data collection period;
- Documents related to the regional monthly meetings (presentation slides, operational reviews, operational and strategic initiatives and so forth)
- HR internal documents (such as: job descriptions, training and development plans, and the results of a recent employee satisfaction survey);
- Operational documents which are usually communicated to FLMs from the head office (such as marketing documents); and
- The weekly 'employee newsletter' communicated from head office to front-line employees through FLMs (FLMs have to go through the items in the newsletter during a weekly meeting).

External documents were also collected. These included industry reports and industry's news and publications covering optometry and retail. These external documents were important to understand some of the wider social and historical context of Optica (Stones, 2005) including the business environment (especially the competition) and some landmarks in Optica's history (such as the appointment of a new CEO or an acquisition of another retail chain).

4.5 Summary – research strategy and data collection methods

In the first part of this chapter, the researcher's philosophical position, which relies on practice-philosophy and a structurationist view of the world, was clarified before discussing the research strategy. A case study approach was adopted to answer the exploratory research questions to afford the researcher a close examination of the interrelationship between structure and agency. Having been an employee at Optica for four years privileged the researcher with a nuanced understanding of the research setting. Further, measures were taken to overcome the challenges raised by this relationship and avoid narrow-sightedness while paying due attention to ethical issues. Following that, the research participants were introduced, along with the reasoning behind the theoretical and purposeful sampling. Collecting data from multiple participants using multiple methods is encouraged when investigating a social phenomenon using a case study approach, therefore the three data collection methods employed in the present research were discussed. Namely, details and justifications are provided for using semi-structured interviews, conducting non-participant observations and collecting internal and external documents. The second part of this chapter deals with SST as a theoretical lens to examine and make sense of the data.

4.6 Stones' Strong Structuration Theory (SST)

Giddens developed the Theory of Structuration during the late 70s and the mid-80s. Since then, the theory has witnessed many developments (e.g. Barley and Tolbert, 1997; Cohen, 1989; DeSanctis and Poole, 1994; Parker, 2006; Sewell Jr., 1992). Most recently, Stones develops a reinforced version of ToS

with a systematic concern with empirical research, known as Strong Structuration Theory (SST) (Greenhalgh and Stones, 2010; Greenhalgh et al., 2014; Greenhalgh et al., 2013; O'Reilly et al., 2014; Stones, 1991, 2001, 2005, 2014; Stones and Tangsupvattana, 2012).

To avoid confusion, Giddens' original Theory of Structuration is referred to as ToS, the abbreviation SST refers to Stones' Strong Structuration Theory. The term 'structurationism' is used as an all-inclusive term, describing the shared prime notions between the two (Table 4-5 (p.133) offers a concise comparison).

Stones's (2005) SST maintains ToS's core premise (the duality of structure) while, at the same time, developing a more actionable explication and holding important theoretical and empirical implications for SaP research as will evidenced in this section. Recently, SST has been employed to theorise empirical research in such diverse fields as: education (Aldous et al., 2014), health care management (Greenhalgh et al., 2014; Greenhalgh et al., 2013) immigration (Stones and Tangsupvattana, 2012), accounting (Coad and Glyptis; Jack and Kholeif, 2007, 2008), information systems (Greenhalgh and Stones, 2010), and political affairs (Stones and Tangsupvattana, 2012).

Stones departs from Giddens' ToS and takes into consideration major critiques by social theorists such as Archer (1982, 1995), Sewell Jr (1992) and Mouzelis (1991). Stones chooses to develop the philosophical and abstract level (ontology-in-general) so it can relate to particular social processes and events in particular times and places (ontology-in-situ), or to move from "all and every" to "who did what, where, when, how and why?" (Parker, 2006, p.122). This makes SST the most comprehensive development in structurationism since its inception (Parker, 2006; Jack and Kholeif, 2007).

4.6.1 Developing an ontology-in-situ

Stones (2005, p.77) sees three levels of ontology relevant for empirical analysis. The most abstract level provides broad guidance for research, whilst the ontic level is filled with substantive empirical detail informed by specific practices and processes in specific time and space. Between these two, a third intermediate ontological level exists, Stones argues, that connects the ontic and abstract levels. This third in-situ level is of particular interest to empirical researchers as it accommodates variations and relative degrees of generalised (abstract) knowledge. The in-situ level acts like a bridge between ontic and abstract analyses, offering a vocabulary for a more relational epistemology that is sensitive to the SaP research tenets.

Stones (2005) argues that research is a 'drilling down' process, investigating phenomena in ever greater detail. An SST research strategy should necessarily involve studying both hermeneutics and broader structures (Stones, 2005). Stones refers to Parker's (2000) "intermediate temporality" as an appropriate approach to examine the interplay between structure and agency in cycles of structuration. Parker (2000, p.120) argues that structuration unfolds in an intermediate zone of reality, situated between historical social systems and individual actions. He (2000, p.107) further specifies that in order to study the interplay between agency and structure one should investigate the temporality of the practices, therefore their temporal occupation of and within historical processes. Parker introduces "intermediate temporality" inviting Giddens to develop ToS in a way that relates individual agency to specific historically embedded contexts (2000, p.107). To study intermediate temporalities

empirically, Stones draws on Bhaskar's (1979/1998) position-practices and Cohen's (1989) position-practice relations.

Bhaskar uses the notion of position-practices to combine the social structure position (such as: function, role, task, duty and right, et cetera) with actors' individual practices, they are "slots... in the social structure into which active subjects must slip in order to reproduce it" (Bhaskar, 1979/1998, p.44). Stones is not at ease with this functional description, suggesting that position practices can be understood as "institutionalised positions, positional identities, the sense of prerogatives and obligation" (Stones, 2005, p.63).

Cohen (1989, p.211), expanding on Bhaskar, draws attention to the complexity of relations existing between position-practices and how actors embody these in their conduct. Stones develops this notion further, arguing that events (and practices) are better understood within a flow of position-practices and their networks of relations (Stones and Tangsupvattana, 2012, p.6). Specifically, one can build up a "theorised contextual frame" of these position-practice relations directly relevant to specific research questions (Stones and Tangsupvattana, 2012, p.223). For example, a Strategy Director is a social position that implies certain responsibilities, obligations, powers, and norms of conduct that are recognised as commensurate with how Strategy Directors are socially perceived. This social position emerges over time, as previous incumbents and institutional rules establish practices - the behaviours, actions, duties and conducts - that mark the position out as that of a Strategy Director. This results in actors that step into this position having: 1) to accept certain obligations associated with the position and 2) the possibility of elaborating on these structural aspects through the creativity of her agency.

Position-practices are social in the sense that specific positions need to establish relations with other social positions. Strategy Directors enjoy multiple, complex social relationships, both vertically with CEOs and chairs upwards, and with other strategy staff and middle managers downwards, and horizontally, with fellow directors, external stakeholders and possibly strategy consultants. Such relationships comprise position-practice relations (Cohen, 1989). However, although positions are undoubtedly social, in their manifestation they are also individual and subject to the pressures and influences of specific contexts. A Strategy Director has to take account of the specific and distinctive set of position-practice relations for a particular organisation, as well as the socially recognized practices that go with the role. Each position-practices is therefore located within a complex web of position-practice relations. An SST approach builds a contextual frame relevant to the agent-in-focus by studying these position-practice relations. This is possible because actors within position-practices, a Strategy Director for example, are assumed to be reflexively knowledgeable of that specific social position and the web of practices surrounding it, in order to be a source of knowledge concerning how agency is carried out and how structures are reproduced. As a construct for practice and process researchers, position-practices “can serve as a more robust link between structure and institutionalised modes of conduct” (Cohen, 1989, p.209) and address the absence of an institutional link in ToS identified by Thrift (1985).

In developing an ontology-in-situ and paying due attention to the position-practice relations network, SST significantly develops the link between the individual and institutional levels through situating practices within their context.

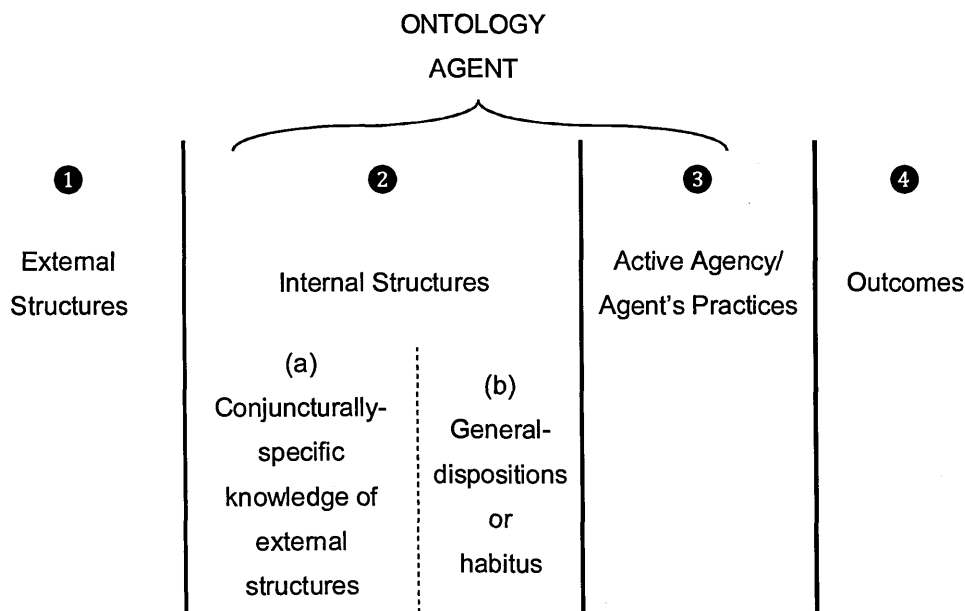
This led Stones to re-examine the relationship between structure and agency, developing the quadripartite cycle of structuration.

4.6.2 The quadripartite cycle of structuration

Right at the heart of SST, Stones argues for a quadripartite processual model of structuration (Figure 4-1, p.130). Unfolding the quadripartite elements illustrates similarities and disparities between ToS and SST.

External structures are “independent forces and pressuring conditions that limit the freedom of agents to do otherwise” (Stones, 2005, p.111). This follows Sewell Jr. (1992) and challenges Giddens’ conception of structure as being limited to virtual existence (Giddens, 1984). According to Stones (2005, p.111), external structures are of two forms. The first has independent causal influences, to which agents have no physical capacity to resist or control. The second, is “irresistible” (Stones, 2005) causal forces, to which the agent feels unable to change or resist, but is able to resist or change under certain circumstances, like the constraining structures discussed in Mantere (2008). Stones (2005, p.115) argues that an agent can choose to resist or change external forces if they possess three properties: adequate power to resist; adequate knowledge of the external structures; and adequate critical reflective distance from the action.

Figure 4-1 The quadripartite of structuration (Stones, 2005,p.85)



Stones analytically divides internal structures, these are structures within the agent, to general-dispositions and positional conjuncturally-specific.

- a. The *general-dispositions structures* (or what Bourdieu (1977) calls habitus) encompasses “transposable skills and dispositions, including generalised worldviews and cultural schemas, classifications, typification of things, people and networks, principles of actions, typified recipes of action, deep binary frameworks of signification, gesture and methodologies for adapting this generalised knowledge to a range or particular practices in particular locations in time and space” (Stones, 2005, p.88).
- b. The *conjuncturally-specific or positional structures* refers to “the notion of a role or position which has embedded within it various rules and normative expectations” (Stones, 2005, p.89). This type of internal structures involves the agent’s knowledge of the situated, specific context of the

action. Consequently, it incorporates the knowledge of Giddens' three aspects of structures (signification, domination and legitimation). The positional conjuncture-specific internal structures are the medium of structuration, and therefore, they bridge the gap between the external structures and the internal structures. Further, the agent-in-focus is always in a flow of position-practices relations with other agents-in-context.

Illustrations of both types of internal structures are discussed in Rouleau's (2005) study whereby the author discerns how external structures are present in the encounters of middle managers with stakeholders, or in the general dispositions (or habitus) of actors (being Francophone or Anglophone). Rouleau's (2005) also addresses how internal structures that manifest in the conjuncture-specific tacit knowledge (previous relevant professional experience as middle managers) are employed to achieve the intended outcomes (selling strategic change to external stakeholders).

Active agency is the dynamic part of the structuration cycle where the two types of internal structures are combined. Agency is, just as Giddens sees it; choosing to act or the acting itself. Consistent with Giddens' stratification model of the agent, Stones distinguishes five elements of the active agency (Stones, 2005, p.101):

- a. Shifting horizons of action, arising from the motivated persuasive action;
- b. Creativity, improvisation and innovations within the agent's conduct (it is possible that what is supposed to happen turns up in a different way);
- c. Degrees of critical distance and critical reflection upon the internal structures;

- d. Conscious and unconscious motivations that affect how internal structures (both) are perceived and drawn upon; and
- e. The ordering or prioritising of concerns into a hierarchy of purposes (Giddens' rationalisation of action) due to the pluralities of projects attached to the different status.

Outcomes are the effects that the structuration cycle has on structures, whether internal or external. At the end of the structuration cycle, active agency has the ability to support and strengthen, disrupt, challenge and/or alter existing structures. Whatever outcomes emerge, they become the basis for the next structuration cycle (Stones, 2005).

The four aspects of the quadripartite are interlinked (Stones, 2005, p.84): structures are the medium of the conduct (internal) and the outcomes of the conduct (both internal and external). The active agency is the dynamic aspect which is closely intertwined with the other parts and cannot be separated from them. Parker (2006) believes Stones' discussion of agency and structures offers researchers the means to investigate the interplay between the two. Edwards (2006, p.911) echoes this, seeing SST as a question-led approach compared to Giddens' concept-led approach.

Table 4-5 Summary of some key concepts in ToS and SST

	ToS (Giddens, 1979; 1984)	SST (Stones,2005)
Ontology and epistemology	Favours ontology over epistemology Develops an ontology-in-general Lacks methodological details for empirical research	Develops an ontology-in-situ Focus on meso-level ontological concepts Provides a detailed research strategy
Agency/agent	Agency is the capability of doing things, power is embedded Agents are knowledgeable and reflexive	Active agency is in the choosing to act, or in the acting The agent-in-focus is in the flow of position-practices
Structure(s)	Structure is regarded as rules (signification and legitimation) and resources (domination) Structuring properties that allow the binding of time-space in social system	Two main types of structures, internal and external Internal structures are a combination of conjuncturally-specific knowledge of external structures and general-dispositions
Relationship between structure and agency	A duality, structure only exists within the knowledgeability of the agent Social practice is mediated by and reproduces structure Structures is the outcome and medium of the social practice, producing social systems	A duality, but external structure exists independent of the agent through position-practices Active agency combines the two types of structures in the conduct, structures are still the medium and the outcome of social practice The structuration process unfolds through the quadripartite cycle of structuration

Table 4-5 above offers a comparison of how structures, agency and the interplay between them are theorised in ToS and SST. The ontological distinction between two types of structures, and presenting structuration as a process that unfolds over time, add a much-needed clarity to structurationism. Through his concept of SST, Stones appears to address the most important limitations of ToS

in four ways. First, SST develops an ontology-in-situ to establish individual-institutional links. Second, the detailed and sophisticated conceptualization of structures, internal and external, overcomes the ambiguity and confusion in Giddens. Third, the quadripartite of structuration accounts for how structuration develops/unfolds over time through introducing four sequential 'phases', and fourth, SST offers detailed methodological steps to investigate the structuration cycle. I now focus on the methodological implications of adopting SST.

4.6.3 Operationalisation of SST

SST has been employed at various steps in the present research. Indeed, the present study made use of all the main concepts in SST in order to theorise from the field data (position-practices, position-practice relations, the four elements of the structuration cycle, structuration process as a cycle) as evidence in the findings and the discussion chapters. Therefore, it is important to explicate how the present research mobilised and/or modified some of these elements.

The data analysis process, detailed below in heading 4.7, started by the broad four-steps framework provided by Stones (2005). Stones' framework remained too general and indeed he (Stones, 2005) provided this as set of four flexible elements. However, I had to develop this broad framework to produce a more detailed data analysis process (see Figure 4-2, p.141). This point will be detailed shortly in this chapter (4.7.2).

During data coding in the present research, it was difficult to separate the actions from the consequences of actions, or, in SST vocabularies, the active agency from the outcomes of the structuration cycle. While ontologically a sound distinction, epistemically research participants discussed the two together: this is

what had happened, and these were the consequences. Since agency is contextual, it appears problematic to separate the action from its impact on the context. Indeed, I combined these two elements in the findings chapter because separating the two seemed redundant, if not problematic, in exploring how FLMs strategize and how structure and agency co-emerge and co-depend in the strategizing praxis.

Another area where the present research had to develop was the way one could identify SST theoretical concepts in the empirical data. My main unit of analysis was the practices of FLMs. I examined these and identified what I eventually called 'localising' as the main strategizing praxis conducted by FLMs. This identification was completed in the third stage of the data analysis process (explained below in 4.7). I then scrutinised the practices involved in this praxis, which emerged earlier in the second stage of the data analysis, namely localising according to the local team and localising according to the local competitive environment. I then examined these practices in the light of the theoretical concepts asking: what are the themes that appear to match this or that theoretical concept? An example will be external structures. Stones discussed these as social structures independent from the actor and shared by the agents-in-context. Such structures bear down on the agent pushing their conducts in a certain direction by limiting the agent's ability to do otherwise (see 4.6.2, p.129). Hence, I asked myself 'what are the identified codes and themes that appears 1- independent from the agent and 2- drive the localising of FLMs towards a common end?' Consequently, I identified some aspects of strategy that play such role, namely organisational structures of strategy being perceived as a brand market share, as a shared vision/mission and as targets and KPIs.

I describe this process later in this chapter as a 'mapping', the outcome of this mapping eventually structured the findings chapter and can be found in Table 5-1 (p.163). Mapping was necessary to reduce the complexity of the data and find the most relevant issue to the phenomena of interest: the interrelation between structure and agency during FLMs' strategizing. Would I have started by trying to identify all external structures in the data, I would have ended with thousands of unrelated codes.

To sum up this part, I needed to mobilise SST and its concepts in a way that fits with the research objectives and context. SST needed not be combined with another theoretical perspective to make sense of the data. However, it had to be mobilised in a way that serves the research questions and within the research context.

4.7 Analysis

Theorising through a structuration approach entails a theoretical conceptualisation of the interrelationship between structure and agency in a recursive process over a prolonged period of time (Jack and Kholeif, 2007; Stones, 2005, 2009). Seeking to understand the individual/institutional (agential/structural) relationship was a major concern during the data analysis. SST provides broad methodological guidance for data analysis that pays a 'balanced' attention to structure and agency and how they unfold at the *in situ* level of ontology (Stones, 2005). However, more details than what appears in Stones' (2005) work were developed by incorporating abductive logic of inquiry in the research process of reducing complexity and generating theoretical

insights. Nevertheless, SST was sufficient to make sense of the data without the need for another complementary theoretical perspective.

The analysis process progressed through two recurrent cycles, each including both context and conduct bracketing (Giddens, 1984; Stones, 2005). This progress between context and conduct bracketing was in tandem with an analytical movement between data and theory. Hence, the data analysis is presented as a process composed of four stages. Table 4-7 (p.152) presents a summary of the research activities and the outcomes at each stage.

4.7.1 In the search for individual/institutional links

In the review of the relevant literature, it was found that ToS-influenced studies, within SaP, stress the strategic agency of strategists over the structural context of their conduct (Elbasha and Wright, 2012). Indeed, SaP research has long been criticised for foregrounding the individual at the expense of establishing links between the individual and the institution (Carter et al., 2008b; Seidl and Whittington, 2014). One claim for using SST, as previously argued, is its potential for establishing the individual/institutional links at the individual level through adopting an ontology in-situ stance (Stones, 2005). In fact, SST suggests four methodological steps to guide the data analysis and advocates combining *both* types of methodological bracketing during the analysis process (compared to ToS' suggestion to use either).

Two types of methodological bracketing exist in SST. In the first type, agent's context analysis, is used to analyse "... the terrain that faces an agent, the terrain that constitutes the range of possibilities and limits to the possible" (Stones, 2005, p.122). Agent's context analysis foregrounds the external

elements of structuration, empowering researchers with the lens to examine the possibilities and limitations offered and posed by institutional position-practices. The second type of methodological bracketing, agent's conduct analysis, foregrounds the agent's reflexive monitoring of actions, ordering of concerns, motives, desires and the way that agents interact with other social actors (Stones, 1996, 2005, p.122).

Stones (2005, p.123) goes further and specifies four typical recurring research steps to bring together three elements; the research questions, the empirical evidence; and the theoretical insights from the structurationist perspective. These four steps (Stones, 2005) can be prioritised or combined depending on the research questions as follows:

1. Identifying the general-dispositional frame through conduct analysis;
2. Identifying the conjuncturally-specific internal structures in terms of, a) how they constrain or offer possibilities, and b) how the agent's perceptions affects the hierarchical order of projects;
3. Identifying relevant external structural clusters from the researcher's point of view; and
4. Identifying 'objective' possibilities and constraints of the external clusters on the agent.

Armed with this overarching methodological framework, an analysis of field data was embarked upon. SST empowered better understanding and establishment of individual/institutional links in three ways. First, by accommodating both types of methodological bracketing I was able to pay balanced attention to structure and agency without favouring either. Striking this balance improved my ability to analytically theorise the relationship between the

individual and the institutional level. Second, by explicitly addressing the agents-in-focus' position-practices and their position-practice relations, it became easier to study how the institutional context constrains or enables the conduct of FLMS. Finally, by understanding the social relationship between the FLMS and their wider social and historical context (in terms of power, legitimation, norms, behaviours, expectations et cetera...) I was able to theorise FLMS' ability to enact and embody the organisation's strategy in their day-to-day work.

Seeking to understand and theorise individual/institutional links is a difficult and a time-consuming commitment (see also Herepath, 2014). However, I was privileged to dedicate an entire year for data analysis. Once acquired, the analytical skills developed should be deployed faster and more efficiently in future research projects.

4.7.2 The four-dimension analysis model

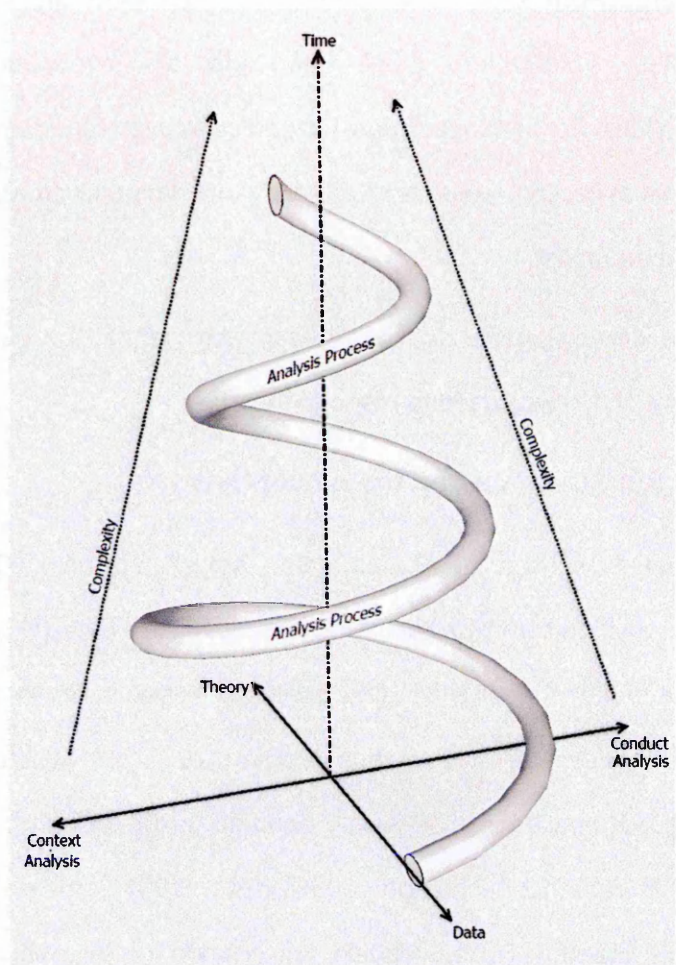
Stones' proposed four steps provided a general framework for the analysis. Nevertheless, "since each qualitative study is unique, the analytical approach used will be unique" (Patton, 2002, p.433). Towards the end of the analysis process and as whilst drafting this chapter, the analytical notes and research memos were used to reflect on the data analysis process. This reflection revealed two core concerns during the analysis process. First, both conduct and context methodological bracketing were pursued. This is expected given SST's methodological guidelines. The second concern, to my surprise, was moving between the data and the theory abductively (Johnson and Duberley, 2000) "mobilising both inductive and deductive approaches iteratively" as Langley

(1999, p.708) describes it. This was surprising because very little has been said within structurationism about moving between the theory and data.

This analytical process as is represented as a recurrent movement within and along four dimensions. The first dimension represents the move between data and theory, employing induction and deduction (Langley, 1999). The second dimension represents the move between the two types of methodological bracketing; that is, context and conduct analysis (Stones, 1996, 2005). The third dimension represents time, whilst the fourth and final dimension represents complexity. As a result, the analysis process is represented by the helix moving along these dimensions (Figure 4-2, p.141).

It is therefore believed this model can guide empirical research seeking to theorise links between the individual and the institutional by means of combining conduct and context methodological bracketing. Academic research must produce, among other things, theoretical knowledge (van de Ven and Johnson, 2006). Hence, one purpose of qualitative data analysis is to reduce complexity of the field data in pursuit of a novel theoretical contribution (Dey, 1993, p.117). This complexity reduction involves moving from field data, to codes, to concepts, and then to themes and categories (Gioia et al., 2012). Using a helix to represent the data analysis process is symbolic of the iterative and the recurrent analysis process that connects data and theory, as well as the individual and the institutional. Needless to say, the clear-cut helical movement here is for simplification because the data analysis process is far messier in real life (Bryman and Bell, 2003; Langley, 1999).

Figure 4-2 The four-dimension data analysis model



The analysis process in the present researcher (Figure 4-2, p.141) involved two 'cycles', and each cycle involved an agent's conduct analysis and an agent's context analysis, making up four stages in total. The beginning of each cycle was marked by (re-)examining the field data. Therefore, the decision to start with data before theory; and to conduct analysis before context analysis, were driven by the research questions. The present research questions are exploratory, thus I started with the data. Equally, the questions place the practices of FLMs at the heart of the analysis, which was the reason for starting with agent's conduct analysis. This chapter presents the analysis process as composed of

four distinctive stages. In reality, these stages overlapped more than it is neatly presented here, which is expected due to the untidiness of qualitative research (Langley, 1999). Furthermore, these four stages also overlapped with other research activities. For instance, stage 1 in particular overlapped with the last few months of data collection, whilst stages 3 and 4 overlapped with writing up some parts of this manuscript.

Before discussing the details of these four stages, the next subsection discusses how Nvivo was used to manage the data.

4.7.3 Preparing the data and the use of Nvivo ©

Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) are helpful when dealing with qualitative, rich and complex data (Richards, 2002). NVivo © was used to *assist* the data analysis. In particular, NVivo facilitated managing data and ideas (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013, p.3; Maietta, 2008). The use of CAQDAS has been extensively debated in the research methodology literature (Gilbert, 2002; Johnston, 2006; Kelle, 2004), and recent debates extended this literature to a detailed comparison of the different software packages (Evers et al., 2010). What prevails from this continuing debate is that CAQDAS offer tools to increase researchers' efficiency, yet it does not replace their skills (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013).

Using NVivo ©, data was classified according to participants, locations and their type. All secondary data (documents) was labelled by the date of their initial production rather than the collection date. Interviews transcripts and field notes were labelled according to the location of data collection, and FLMs were referred to by their location instead of their names (e.g. FLM Wembley). This quickly

became problematic because some FLMS changed stores in the course of data collection, and visits were made to multiple stores (see Table 4-2, p.111). This was also a useful learning point to focus the analysis; core interest was with the actors' practices (the managers) and not the location (the store). During a later stage, I took advantage of this by comparing and contrasting, when possible, the different activities and practices of the same manager in different locations. Eventually, the original names of research participants were used during the analysis and early stages of writing up this thesis. At the final stage of drafting the thesis, these were changed to pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities.

4.7.4 Deciding on a coding technique

To carry out both conduct and context analysis, a thematic analysis approach was employed (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.83). Thematic analysis is a flexible tool used in data analysis across a wide range of qualitative methodologies (Ryan and Bernard, 2000). This tool is arguably the first skill novice qualitative researchers should learn (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.78). Thematic analysis aims to reduce the complexity of the data by revealing 'patterns' within the dataset (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gioia et al., 2012; Langley, 1999). Patterns are revealed through a process of 'coding', when a summative, descriptive, essence-capturing attribute is assigned to a part of the data (Saldaña, 2009, p.3). These codes are then organised into themes, which can be derived either using *a priori* theoretical constructs, or, as in the case of the present research, according to the degree of similarity among the codes. Themes can be assembled into concepts which can be used to develop models (Gioia et al., 2012). Reducing complexity in the present study, then, involved moving from field

data to themes that are later organised in theoretical concepts. The research findings are therefore presented according to the 13 themes that emerged from the data analysis, structured around four theoretical concepts drawn from SST.

As a result of talking to colleagues and senior researchers, in addition to reading empirical research in academic journals, I came to the conclusion that there is no “best way” to code the data (Saldaña, 2009, p.2). To decide on a suitable coding technique, meaning assigning representative thematic codes to the data, three different techniques to code a sample of three interview transcripts were tested. This trial took place at the beginning of the analysis phase, hence before embarking on the analysis activities described in the four stages later. The three different techniques experimented with are:

1. Free and emergent coding, or an ‘emic’ (Silverman, 1993) approach to analysis;
2. Using Stones’ structuration cycle elements (see 4.6.2 The quadripartite cycle of structuration) as *a priori* framework, and coding the interviews according to this conceptual model in a theory-driven approach; and
3. After reading the three interviews, a mind-map of the dominant themes was created, the interviews were then revisited and coded according to the mind map.

Despite this being a time-consuming process, I had the opportunity to experience each technique first-hand, thereby understanding its limitations and strengths. This hands-on experience was very effective in developing qualitative research skills (cf. Cassell et al., 2009). After discussing the results of this experiment with the research supervisors, we decided that the free, emergent and open (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) coding technique was the most appropriate

to answer the exploratory research questions, allowing codes to 'emerge' from the field data. An emic approach gives voice to the participants in the early stages, seeking new concepts about the phenomena of interest (Gioia et al., 2012).

The four stages of the data analysis process are:

- 1- First conduct analysis
- 2- First context analysis
- 3- Second conduct analysis
- 4- Second context analysis

The next four subsections discuss the activities undertaken in, and the outcomes of, each of the stages.

4.7.5 First stage and the first conduct analysis

The analysis was started by employing an emic approach to the thematic coding. Emic approaches use the conceptual framework of the participants rather than imposing the researcher's models on the analysis (Silverman, 1993, p.24). In other words, codes were created and organised into themes based on the "terms, images and ideas that are current in the [participants'] culture itself" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.194). This approach gave more weight to the data over any personal conceptual framework (Wetherell et al., 2001, p.16). For instance, none of the following theoretical notions were used to label the codes: external structure, praxis, practice, practitioner, or strategists. Instead, labels that reflected the data itself were used (see Table 4-6, p.147).

The data was coded in three rounds. The first round of coding took place in the final few months of data collection activity, where I focused on ten

interviews (out of 28) and used a combination of attributes, descriptive and InVivo coding (Saldaña, 2009). Attributes coding was provided earlier (Table 4-1, p.108) and it includes the age, gender and professional training information of the participants. Examples of descriptive and InVivo coding are provided in Table 4-6 below (p.147). In this first round of coding, the entire transcript was coded and no hesitation was made to assign more than one code for the same excerpt where necessary, accommodating the complexity of the data (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013; Saldaña, 2009). CAQDAS's ability to handle the data was particularly helpful. For instance, NVivo© facilitates assigning two codes to the same excerpt, with a different colour for each code and the possibility to rename the codes later.

After coding 10 interview transcripts, which resulted in 175 initial codes, similarities were noted and the data were 'themed' (Saldaña, 2009, p.139). Following Jarzabkowski (2008), codes were assembled into themes by judging their qualitative resemblance, asking the following two questions: 1) is this code similar to this one? and 2) are these two codes different? (Jarzabkowski, 2008, p.626). Some codes were consolidated and as a result, 15 initial themes emerged from the 175 initial codes. The second round continued coding the rest of interviews using the same emic approach, therefore allowing new codes and themes to emerge in the process. These two rounds of coding resulted in just over 300 codes, of which some grouped in themes and some were free or do not belong to a theme. The third and final round of coding was conducted later at the third stage of data analysis.

Table 4-6 Coding examples

coding type (Saldaña, 2009)	Interview data sample	Code
Descriptive	If I come in a really smart dress and wear my name badge and I'm, like, it's all proper, then they will do the same which is why I do not think store managers should wear uniform... However, I do think they should be made to wear certain things. It's about being different. Because we all work in the store, they need to know who the store manager is. If you all look the same, apart from the name badge, because now it's black, on a black suit that you can not even see, I mean, I need to go and say, that's the store manager.	FLM's appearance
InVivo	He [previous CEO] was a very good business man. But I think the problem is many people do not fully understand the store clinically, there is a clinical aspect to what we do together with the retail aspect.	clinical aspect

At the end of the first stage, a conduct analysis was executed to closely examine FLMs' conduct. For instance, I was interested in understanding what it means to be an FLM from their individual perspectives; what they perceived their day-to-day work to be; their fears and concerns; who do they manage; how do they do it, and so on.

4.7.6 Second stage and the first context analysis

In the second stage, the FLMs' context was scrutinised with the assistance of theoretical constructs from SST. In particular, interview data and observation notes were used to study each FLM's immediate context and how she or he reflected on their experience in relation to strategy. A description of each FLM's

context was constructed, seeking to establish links between the immediate context and her/his conduct when possible.

For example, Indy (FLM) gave up a better position as an FLM for a larger store, when he became a father. For him, fatherhood meant spending more time with his little girl, and less hours at work. Hence, he tries not to work overtime and is keen on training his assistant manager so this assistant is able to get on with the job when Indy is not around. Indy (FLM) is now concerned that if this trained assistant manager pursues a career in a different store, then he will have to work longer hours because the other employees are not interested in advancing their career towards managerial positions. Another FLM, Sana, has a strong sense of who she is and what she wants to be. This was evident in her attempt to climb the organisational ranks by disciplining her team and focusing on results. Madin's store, a third FLM, is located in a less-affluent area, highly populated with low-skilled immigrants. He tries to simplify things for his clientele for whom English is not their first language, even if it means 'bending the rules a little bit' and displaying product in locations that does not match the display designed for his store by the Head Office. His previous regional managers understood this requirement, unlike the head office's merchandiser, who insists on matching planograms, a pre-set display plan.

At the end of this stage, I was able to appreciate the FLMs' horizon of actions (see 6.3, p.237): the constraints and the opportunities offered by this immediate context (Stones, 2005).

4.7.7 Third stage and the second conduct analysis

Subsequent to this, the interview data were revisited to refine the codes. At this third round of coding interviews, the content of each code and theme was examined to ensure consistency across the data. The coding process, which started in stage one, was being concluded. Coding produced 285 codes, which are eventually organised into 13 themes, under theoretical concepts drawn from SST (Table 5-1, p.163). As coding the transcripts came to an end, the observation notes and documents were referenced to look for incidences of these themes. In most occasions, the field notes enriched the theme that had emerged from the interview. For example, observations improved the researcher's understanding of the day-to-day work of FLMs beyond what they reported in the interviews, and the document analysis further clarified some points raised in the interviews about the content of internal communication between the HO and the stores. Additionally, I actively sought to identify any tension between what was said and what was done. For example, if an FLM claimed that her/her main concern in the day-to-day running of the store was to look after her customers, the observation notes were used to verify or challenge this claim.

Hence, the commonalities and disparities among the FLMs' conduct in different stores were noted, and common patterns slowly started to emerge. This stage allowed me to compare and contrast different sources (different research participants) and types (interviews, observation notes and documents) of data.

4.7.8 Fourth stage and the second context analysis

The last stage aimed to delineate the organisational context in which FLMs' practices, praxis and conduct unfold and take shape. The major historical organisational strategic shifts cited by research participants were researched. For instance, when the interviews were coded, FLMs mentioned times when the organisation had changed focus from providing the best service to balancing service and profit. This shift was signified by a change in the senior management team. At this fourth stage of analysis, all senior management changes were mapped on a timeline, a fit with the participants' reports was considered. With the help of the secondary data, wider changes within the organisation were also looked at such as any changes in the strategy document or changes in procedures. Therefore a descriptive, chronological narrative (Jarzabkowski, 2008; Langley, 1999) of the strategy at Optica was completed (see 5.2.4, p.168).

Finally, I revisited SST, and linked core theoretical concepts; these are the structuration cycle elements, and the position-practice relations to the data. Guided by reflexivity, structuration cycles in Optica was theorised (6.4, p.249) and I also relied on SST to understand the relationship between the day-to-day work and the organisational-level strategy (6.4.2, p.255). Hence, the researcher continually asked 'what's going on in here?' and 'how does this link to this?' (Gioia et al., 2012; Langley, 1999) so that by the end of this stage and the analysis process, I was at my furthest point from field data and was constructing theoretical and abstract knowledge.

Table 4-7 below (p.152) offers a summary of the main activities and outcomes of each of the four stages discussed earlier, providing reference to where examples can be found in this thesis.

4.7.9 Final notes on the analysis process

It is clear from the analysis process described above that the present research relied primarily on the interviews and secondarily on the observations and documents in the data analysis process. This is consistent with the SST theoretical lens adopted to carry out the present study. Actors are knowledgeable, reflective agents, able to articulate their actions and the reasons for their conducts when prompted to do so, such as in an interview situation (Giddens, 1979; Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007; Stones, 2005). Social research is an investigation, and data collection should aim to find relevant information about the examined phenomenon using multiple sources and methods (Stones, 2005). Lastly, the detailed description of the analysis process provided above aims to enhance research trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Having said that, “no analysis strategy will produce the theory without an uncodifiable creative leap, however small” as Langley (1999, p.691) explains. Through reflection, however, a clear description of the process along with many examples is provided.

Table 4-7 Four Stages of Data Analysis

Stage	Methodological bracketing	Main activities	Main outcomes	Examples can be found in
1	Conduct	First and second rounds of coding	Generating initial themes and codes	Table 4-6, p.147
2	Context	Examining the immediate context of participants	Description of how the context allows or prohibits FLMs actions	6.3, p. 237
3	Conduct	Refining themes and codes Checking consistency between what is said and what is done Comparing FLMs' activities indifferent locations	Finalising the 13 themes Discovering patterns across cases	Table 5-1, p.163
4	Context	Examining the development of Optica using interviews and both internal and external documents	Identifying historical macro forces Chronological description of the strategy development in Optica	5.2.4, p.168

4.8 Summary – data analysis

This chapter started by presenting the researcher's philosophical position and the data collection methods. Following that, it presented Strong Structuration Theory, the lens used to make sense of the data. The data analysis process was then detailed. This process took general SST guidelines (Stones, 2005) and developed them incorporating an abductive logic to data analysis. The resulting model was labelled 'the four-dimension data analysis model'. The analysis, undertaken for the present study actively sought to unearth individual/institutional links by employing both types of methodological bracketing (context and conduct) and an abductive move between data and theory throughout the process. The data analysis progressed in two cycles, each comprising a conduct and a context bracketing. In agent's conduct analysis, the conduct of the FLMs was foregrounded. In agent's context analysis, the structural terrain of FLMs' conduct was studied. Each of these four stages were discussed, illustrating 1) the activities undergone in each stage and 2) the outcomes of each stage.

4.9 Reflexivity

The term reflexivity has been assigned numerous definitions and has been used in diverse ways within the scholarly literature (Lynch, 2000). However, for the purpose of our discussion here, Pels (2000, p.2) provides the following useful definition "in its most elementary form, reflexivity pre-supposes that, while saying something about the 'real world', one is simultaneously disclosing something about one-self". Evident in this research notes and journal, my own assumptions and beliefs about the topic have been challenged over the period of the present research. A shift was observed from an assertive tone in early writings that was

authoritative and opinionated, to a one that can be seen as critical and accepting of other interpretations. Johnson and Duberley (2000, p.178) label this reflection on self-knowledge as “epistemic reflexivity”, distinguishing it from the “methodological reflexivity” in which researchers reflect and consider how their own behaviours (rather than their knowledge) impact on the research activities. Inevitably, this epistemic reflexivity influenced the research activities as they unfolded over the five years. For instance, when the pilot study was concluded in 2009, I was strongly of the opinion that FLMs have an active role in strategy-formulation. In a pilot interview, Sajan (FLM) felt the need to apologise as he saw the disappointment on my face towards the end of the interview: “I mean I’m sorry it doesn’t answer... I know you’re trying to get how do I... do strategy myself... but it’s like I said... it’s dictated by the company... so...”. When the main data collection started 18 months later, an open-mind approach was adopted and FLMs were asked about what they thought the organisational strategy is, and whether they felt their opinion has an influence that goes beyond their own store and spills over to the organisation as a whole, or not. This shift is closely linked to a development in my own identity, moving from the professional, retailer, know-it-all identity to the sceptical academic and curious researcher identity. Indeed, disclosing something about oneself (or reflexivity) is reflected in the researcher having and changing several elements of identities during the research process (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008).

The researcher’s relationship with Optica is of significance here as well. As discussed earlier, working for the organisation for many years before engaging in this research and gave insights into the jargon, the social dynamics and the ‘secrets of the trade’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In my reflexive approach,

I 'stepped out' and 'observed' this knowledge when writing (and conducting) the research (Brown, 2006). Adopting this reflexive approach meant experiencing the discomfort of challenging pre-formulated assumptions, then critically examining them in the light of the field data, before finally developing new perspectives (Atkins and Murphy, 1993). For instance, previous practical assumptions that optometrists are unable to appreciate commercial benefits were challenged, and an open-mind had to be maintained about the issue whilst conducting observations and interviews.

Finally, I construct and communicate my reflexivity with the reader in several ways, following Stakes' (1995) suggestions. First, voluminous excerpts are provided in the Findings chapter before offering the researcher's own interpretations of the data in the discussion chapter. Furthermore, a thorough description of the coding process and examples of these codes are provided for the reader in this (methodology) chapter. What is important to acknowledge is that my current 'knowledge', as influenced by previous identities (e.g. as an employee, as a dispensing optician and so forth), has co-constructed the interpretations stated in this research.

4.10 Establishing trustworthiness

Outcomes of qualitative research in general and case study research particularly, must not be evaluated using the same criteria used in natural sciences (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Outcomes of the present research do not constitute universal statistical laws that explain and predict a relationship between variables. Rather, these outcomes offer insights that could help the reader to understand other situations by explaining situated dynamics (Feldman and

Orlikowski, 2011). This “theoretical generalization” (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011, p.1249) is reported by the majority of SaP studies discussed in this thesis (e.g. Balogun and Johnson, 2005; Beech and Johnson, 2005; Howard-Grenville, 2007; Jarzabkowski, 2008; Maitlis and Lawrence, 2003; Mantere, 2008; Rouleau, 2005; Stensaker and Falkenberg, 2007; Suominen and Mantere, 2010).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest trustworthiness as an appropriate measure to evaluate outcomes from qualitative research. Trustworthiness encompasses persuading the reader to take account of the findings in the light of the arguments posed, and the methods and the process used to reach these findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The authors (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.328) list four pillars for trustworthiness; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The advice of Lincoln and Guba (1985) are therefore followed and employed, via recommended techniques, to establish the trustworthiness of the present study (Table 4-8, p.158).

The first pillar, credibility, represents the reader’s evaluation of whether the research outcomes are credible interpretations of the collected data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Following Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility was established relying on four techniques. First, an in-depth, embedded case study design was used, which is an established approach within the SaP literature (Balogun and Johnson, 2005; Beech and Johnson, 2005; Rouleau, 2005; Stensaker and Falkenberg, 2007) and when adopting a structurationist stance (Jarzabkowski, 2008). Second, the prolonged engagement in the field, in the form of previous employment and a long data collection period, improved understanding of the phenomena within its natural context (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Third, three data collection methods were employed (semi-structured interviews, non-

participant observations and documents) and different sources were engaged with (within Optica: FLMs, RMs and other employees, outside Optica: industry research and publications). This allowed the researcher to compare and contrast data from multiple sources and multiple methods. Fourth, feedback on the research in academic settings was actively sought, both formally (at the Open University and at academic conferences such as the European Group for Organisation Studies, British Academy of Management conference and the Academy of Management annual meeting) and informally through discussions with senior researchers in the field.

Since qualitative research is not designed to infer universally generalizable findings, readers of qualitative research should be able to appreciate the context and judge the transferability of the findings to different settings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Following the authors' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) advice a detailed description of the organisation and research participants are provided (for example Chapter Three; Table 4-1, p.108; and section 5.2.4, p.168).

The third pillar, dependability, addresses the process by which the researcher reached conclusions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Dependability was established by specifying the analysis process and the data collection protocol. Further, the appropriateness of SST, as a theoretical lens and as a methodological framework to conduct SaP research, was critically reflected upon (6.5, p.258).

Table 4-8 Establishing Research Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness criterion	Recommended technique (Lincoln and Guba, 1985)	Steps taken
Credibility	Use of established methods	In-depth, embedded case study research strategy is common within SaP and when adopting structuration
	Prolonged engagement	Over four years of previous employment with Optica, and real-time data collection activities over 12 months
	Triangulation of methods and sources	Using interviews, observations and collecting documents. Collecting data from FLMs, MMs, organisational archive and industry publications
	Peer debriefing	-Presenting the research and obtaining feedback from supervisors and other scholars at conferences
Transferability	Thick description	- Providing background information about Optica and the research participants - Providing a thorough description of FLMs day-to-day activities and their understanding of organisational-level strategy
Dependability	Using overlapping methods	Triangulations of methods to collect data about the same phenomenon (as described above)
	Providing a detailed description of the methodology	- Detailing the research design, the evolution of the data collection protocol, and operational challenges during data collection - Reflecting on the appropriateness of the SST as a methodology
Confirmability	Audit trail Triangulation Reflexivity	- The following are kept and indexed: raw data, structure of themes and codes, notes about methodological procedures (protocol and analysis), research designs and rationale, methodological reflections, research development and analytical notes - Understanding the limitation of a case study research strategy - Providing a reflexive account

Finally, confirmability accounts for the researcher's interpretations during the research process, reflecting the extent to which the findings are shaped by the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Reflexive memos were kept during the data collection and the analysis process; recoding emergent ideas, concepts, concerns, questions to follow up, interesting insights and so on. Moreover, accounts of reflexivity, and how my own beliefs and assumptions had been challenged and altered as a result of the research process, are shared with the reader (see 4.9, p.153).

4.11 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the present research's methodological choices have been presented, clarified and justified, discussing their suitability to answer the research questions. I believe that social sciences produce reality, which is grasped through the day-to-day practice. Hence, structurationism as the guiding theoretical framework was chosen because of its ontological affinity and its potential to study the interrelationship between structure and agency. A case study strategy was adopted because it allowed me to study FLMs' strategizing in ever greater details, and it is the recommended method to study the interactions between structure and agency.

Previous employment with Optica privileged the researcher with prior detailed knowledge of the research setting. It also posed some challenges and ethical issues, which was attended to with the help of the ESRC and the Open University's guidelines.

Twenty-four FLMs and four MMs participated in this research. 127 hours of non-participant observations, twenty-eight interviews and over two hundred

pages of internal and external documents were generated for this research. The diversity in the level and the sources of data allowed better investigation of the phenomenon of interest in FLMs' strategizing.

Whilst planning and preparing the data collection methods took place in advance, multiple unexpected circumstances arose when undertaking the data collection activities, like the changes in management and the restructuring of the regions. It was later discovered that it is not only common, but also should be expected in research. Many of these challenges are cited along with lessons learnt from them.

SST was mobilised to obtain the research aim in understanding the interrelationship between structure and agency at the individual level during strategizing. While developing an ontology in situ, Stones (2005) argues that structuration proceeds in cycles, each composed of four elements. Social agents should also be considered within their position-practices relations with other agents-in-context. Historical and societal forces should also be considered when studying social practices. SST was employed taking into consideration the research objective and context.

The data analysis process benefited from SST's guidelines, although it developed these further. Moving recursively between data and theory, and employing both conduct and context bracketing techniques enabled a more balanced view on structure and agency. This, in turn, positioned the researcher to theorise the relation between them at the FLMs' level.

Reflexivity was constantly present throughout the research, as prior knowledge and presuppositions had been challenged and reconstructed until the final writing stages of this thesis.

Lastly, trustworthiness is an appropriate way to evaluate the rigour and the outcomes of the present qualitative study. This was established by relying on the four pillars of trustworthiness (credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability) and employing different techniques throughout the research design, data collection, data presentation, analysis and until finally writing up of the research outcomes.

The methodology chapter, then, gave a comprehensive description of the motivations, planning and execution of the present study. More importantly, reflective accounts reported in this chapter mirror how 'hands-one experience' taught the researcher, a junior academic investigator, some of the important crafts about being a qualitative researcher.

Chapter Five - Findings

5.1 Overview of the chapter

The Methodology Chapter stipulated that, following Nicolini (2012), the main unit of analysis is the practices of FLMS. That chapter equally presented the analysis process (Figure 4-2, p.141), and established that it incorporated an abductive and iterative movement (Johnson and Duberley, 2000) between data and theory, carrying out both conduct and context analyses. Indeed, by inductively (Langley, 1999) constructing codes, an emic approach to coding was adopted (Silverman, 1993). These codes were themed, and a list of the themes is in the right-hand column of Table 5-1 below. Towards the end of the analysis process, these themes were mapped against core theoretical concepts from SST (Stones, 2005), a process explained in 4.6.3 (p.134), which are listed in the middle column of Table 5-1 below (p.163).

This chapter is presented under four main sections, each addressing one of the four research questions.

Table 5-1 Final themes organised in four theoretical concepts

The relevant research question	Theoretical concept	Themes
What are the main external structures drawn upon by FLMs when strategizing?	External Structures	Strategy as a shared vision/mission Strategy as a brand and a market share Strategy as targets and KPIs Previous CEOs in Optica
What are the main internal structures drawn upon by FLMs when strategizing?	Internal Structures	Strategy 'depends on who's in charge' Strategy 'depends on what desk you sit behind' The importance of strategy The FLM's professional experience
How does FLMs' strategic agency manifest in FLMs' day-to-day conduct?	Agency and Outcomes	The day-to-day work Localising FLMs influence over the organisation
What are the main position-practice relations within which FLMs operate?	The flow of position-practices relations	Relation with other social actors in context Communications

Each of the four sections in this chapter starts by presenting the theoretical concept, and rationalising why the corresponding (and emergent) themes are categorised under that subheading. Following this, themes are exposed with examples from the field data.

5.2 External structures

Stones (2005, p.111) presents external structures as: “pressuring conditions that limit the freedom of agents to do otherwise”. These structures are external to agents in the sense that they exist independently of the agent her/himself. In the present case study, external structures refer to the independent social structures that place limitations on FLMs’ day-to-day strategizing work, directing their activities towards a common end. Three themes reflected external structures in the field data, these are: strategy as a shared vision/mission, strategy as a brand image and a market share, and strategy as targets linked to key performance indicators (KPIs). These three themes are considered external because they are independent of any individual agent, but are shared by, and imposed upon, all employees in Optica. Indeed, FLMs reported their inability to change these structures and the need to conduct their activities within these structures. The first three subsections discuss each of these structures.

When discussing Optica’s strategy, research participants cited the appointments of different CEOs as significant and influential events. The different CEOs Optica had in the past 13 years and the different ‘strategies’ they announced and adopted are also presented. This narrative was produced relying heavily on participants’ personal accounts of their experience, secondary data from within and outside of Optica, and on the personal experience of the researcher as an employee. This is presented in the final subsection 5.2.4.

5.2.1 Strategy as a shared vision/mission

Many FLMs saw strategy as the shared vision/mission for all employees in Optica. Balan (FLM), for instance, saw strategy as “a sense of direction and, um, following that sense of direction in achieving goals”. Strategy, in the words of Sajan (FLM), provides “a consistent direction across the whole company”. Raji saw this overall consistency as being important, irrespective of the details: “regardless of if someone says, you have to walk on the left-hand side or the right hand side of the road... you’re ultimately all walking in the same direction towards the same goal” (Raji, FLM).

Almost unanimously, research participants believed Optica’s mission/vision is to deliver excellent customer service. This is “the real ethos of the company” (Stacy, FLM) and “what is Optica, what does it stand for” (Yeva, FLM). Providing excellent customer service indeed features the ultimate mission of Optica in its official strategy statement (Internal Document). Equally, terms like ‘quality’, ‘customer care’ and ‘customer satisfaction’ are used extensively in internal communications (Internal Documents). Furthermore, ideas that contradict with this ethos were deemed unacceptable by FLMs. For example, Sana talked about a period where “we went from customer service and all that kind of thing... and your people, to: forget all that; money; targets, you know... and it kind of went and lost direction” (Sana, FLM). Yeva equally described the same period:

“I think we lost our way there a bit, that’s for me when it kind of get a bit [focused solely on monetary targets]... I think we are getting back, more back on track now as to where, sort of, where we want to be, but it did lost its way a bit.”

(Yeva, FLM)

FLMs' work, then, is led by their belief that Optica stands for providing high-quality services and products to customers.

5.2.2 Strategy as a brand and a market share

Between 2000 and 2012, Optica adopted a growth strategy and set an aim of being the second largest optical retailer in terms of market share in the UK (Internal Document). This ambition was perceived as an important aspect of Optica's strategy. Industry reports suggest Optica had come very close to realising this ambition, but fell short of it because of a merger between two competitors. Sana recalled this:

"Optica want to be the leaders in the optical market, do not they? So their strategy is to be... I think it was to become second by 2012, I'm pretty sure it was that, uh, but that might have changed since X & Y [names of two competitors] merged, because they kind of took a bigger chunk of the market share... you're looking at market share, and you're looking at how big you want to be as a company, and as a brand"

(Sana, FLM)

Research participants believed that achieving such ambition is possible only through providing superior customer service and products of high quality. Consequently, FLMs believed that a certain brand image is an essential part of Optica's strategy. When Hiba was asked about Optica's strategy, she said that the organisation's strategy concerns:

"just making sure that people [customers] understand who we are, how people perceive Optica. For me, it's all... it's the brand. That's what they [top managers] want to actually make sure gets [across]... that's where the value lies, in the brand. The strategy in that respect just sets

the foundations and gives all the stores consistency so that customers recognise that, you know, okay... fine... this is Optica."

(Hiba, FLM)

Having a consistent brand image is a very important issue in Optica, and FLMs day-to-day work must serve this end (Isaac, MM). So much so that the top management in 2010 have set out a specific inspection procedure for FLMs to ensure that Optica's stores look and feel alike (Internal Documents).

5.2.3 Strategy as targets and as KPIs

KPIs and similar strategy targets in Optica are about "sales, EBIT [Earnings Before Interest and Taxation], growth, market position, and being [the] number one optical retailer" (Amanda, FLM), and many FLMs associated Optica's strategy with these targets. This is because a precise and quantified figure provides FLMs with "something you work towards" (Adele, FLM). Strategic targets appear on Optica's official strategy statement, but more importantly, they are presented, sometimes modified, and prioritised every year at the annual conference:

'Strategy is formulated at the top level by different departments, which is then presented at the yearly Optica conference, where 'they' [top managers] announce the big themes for the year "so you know what you're doing for the next year".'

(Lea, FLM)

The annual targets set the agenda for the following year, leading FLMs to prioritise some areas of improvements. Kedar explained that strategy is:

"what your focuses were supposed to be, like they [senior management] give you focus, et cetera, this is... you focus on DER [Dispensed Exam Rate, an important KPI in the optical retailing

industry]], you focus on this, for example, your strategy for the year is, you need to get this done by the end of the year.”

(Kedar, FLM)

FLMs worked hard to achieve these pre-set targets, and some of their day-to-day work, such as sales management, was explicitly concerned with these (Observation Notes). Further, these targets indirectly restricted some other tasks. For instance, Jack (FLM) insisted on keeping a very accurate inventory list because this list influences the store's costs, which in turn affects the store's EBIT level.

5.2.4 Previous CEOs in Optica

Previous CEOs were frequently cited when discussing Optica's strategy. The researcher sought to substantiate the information that emerged during conversations and interviews by examining internal and external documents, such as: internal memos, trade publications and industry reports.

Between 2001 and 2012, Optica had five different CEOs. The first CEO in this period (Mike) stayed for two years (2001-2003), and acted as a consultant for the second CEO for another two years (2003-2005). The second CEO (Ben) stayed in position for five years (2003-2008) and was widely admired and well-remembered by many research participants. These two CEOs, the data reveals, advocated high levels of customer service at any cost, and introduced a culture of focusing on the lower levels in the organisational hierarchy. Top priorities were given to recruiting, training and retaining the best talents. Optica's obsession with quality led it to focus on high-end products in terms of designer brands of optical frames and the most technologically advanced optical lenses. Optica also produced some own-brand frames, which introduced innovative products and

ideas such as lighter, more flexible and customisable frames. As a result, Optica acquired a high-end, quality optician reputation in the UK.

In 2008, Ben was promoted within the European division of the holding company and was replaced by Barry, who was Optica's CEO for the following two years (2008-2010). Barry saw weaknesses in Optica's performance and demanded radical, and abrupt, changes to improve the profit margin. Barry decided, as research participants testified, to shift the priority from recruiting and training employees and providing high-quality service, to attaining the best possible financial results at any cost. FLMS and other employees gave the following as evidence in their testimony:

- All employees, especially sales advisors, were to recommend high-end, most expensive products regardless of customers' wishes and needs;
- Individual financial sales incentives were introduced. These incentives were dependent on the number of high-end items sold by an employee. Hence, they created a strong tension within stores because laboratory technicians or administrative staff were unable to obtain these since their job does not involve selling to customers; and
- Laboratory machinery was reduced to a minimum, leading to large savings at the expense of longer delivery times to customers.

In 2010, Barry was asked to leave Optica and Tony was tasked (by the holding company) with heading the business until a suitable CEO is found. Tony was the acting CEO for one year (2010-2011), during which FLMS and other employees felt a 'void' in the leadership of Optica. Tony's main concern, as perceived by FLMS, was to keep the business running until handing over to his

successor. With these changes, FLMs felt that they lost the decision-making power that used to be in their remit. FLMs talked with nostalgia about the old days (when Mike and Ben were in charge) when they were able to decide what went on in their stores. At that time, FLMs adopted the philosophy that the store employees work for them and Optica pays their salaries. These wide-ranging powers to localise seemed to have been present in forms of choosing and displaying products, authorising salary increases and negotiating performance targets and budgets. With the centralisation of these decisions, FLMs felt as if they were becoming “glorified shop keepers” in the words of Zain (FLM).

The latest CEO (Jay) joined the business in late 2011 and continued in his position until the end of fieldwork. FLMs talked about a new chapter in Optica's life since 2011. Jay started by visiting the stores and commissioning two surveys: one to measure staff satisfaction and a second to gauge customers' perception of Optica and its service levels. Jay made sure to visit stores and speak to FLMs and other employees in person. He also seemed to have asked the new OD (who Jay headhunted from his previous employer) to visit stores on a weekly basis. FLMs felt re-engaged with the company after many years of disengagement during which they believed that Optica had 'lost direction'. Some FLMs appreciated Jay's approach and felt that they are getting back on the 'right path' with the new approach he announced and adopted, such as: returning to a focus on customer satisfaction and high levels of service, re-equipping laboratories, improving communications with the head office, visiting stores and so forth. It is through these organisational practices that FLMs felt most connected to and associated with the new top managers and Optica's strategy.

This chronological narrative evidences the role of CEOs in affecting FLMs' strategic agency. Different CEOs have different opinions about the best way to realise the strategy statements. Mike (CEO) and Ben (CEO) believed in differentiation and providing high-level of service, and consequently set less constraints on FLMs' localising practices empowering the latter (FLMs) to respond to local customers and staff needs. Barry (CEO) believed in uniformity, centralisation and cost cutting as the best approach to attain strategy, and thus curtailed FLMs' localising practices. CEOs set the boundaries within which FLMs at the peripheries are able to conduct their day-to-day work, especially localising, and therefore CEOs have an impact on FLMs' strategy-realising work.

5.2.5 Summary

The data reveals that the FLMs' work is guided by some external structures in Optica. These structures are shared by and imposed upon all FLMs aiming to achieve common organisational objectives. More precisely, FLMs carry out their work within their stores in a way that 1) provides customers with the high quality services and products, 2) preserves Optica's brand image, and 3) aims to attain pre-set targets and performance measures. Indeed, the chronological changes of CEOs over the last 13 years were presented because research participants considered CEOs to have significant consequences on Optica's strategy. Different CEOs had different approaches to achieve the strategic outcomes declared in the strategy statement. These approaches affected the FLMs' freedom to adapt the uniform practices to the local setting, directing their work in a certain direction.

5.3 Internal structures

Internal social structures are of two types (Stones, 2005, pp.88-89). First, general-dispositions are transposable 'skills' and dispositions, as seen in generalised worldviews, classifications and typification of things. Second, conjuncturally-specific structures involve the agent's knowledge of the situated, specific context of the action. Consequently, the latter incorporates knowledge of Giddens' (1979, 1984) three aspects of structures (signification, domination and legitimation). This distinction between the two types of internal structures is not a clear cut (Stones, 2005).

Internal structures surfaced in the field data when research participants discussed strategy as a generalised worldview. Moreover, FLMs' previous experience, and how it influences the day-to-day work, signified their knowledge of their structural context. The themes representing internal structures are:

- Strategy 'depends on who's in charge' (general-dispositions);
- Strategy 'depends on what desk you sit behind' (general-dispositions);
- The importance of strategy (general-dispositions); and
- FLMs' professional experience (conjuncturally-specific).

External structures discussed in 5.2 (p.164) are conditions shared amongst all employees in Optica. Internal structures, on the other hand, are dependent on the experience, opinion and beliefs of the individual agent. Internal structures vary from one research participant to the other. Therefore, different, and sometimes contradicting opinions, are reported under these themes.

5.3.1 Strategy “depends on who’s in charge”

Many FLMs argued that strategic directions are set by the person in charge of the organisation and research participants saw the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) as the main source of strategy in Optica. FLMs similarly stressed the role of the Operations Director (OD) in supporting the CEO. Indeed, an examination of internal and external documents (internal communications and industry reports) illustrates how the appointment of a new CEO in Optica is followed shortly by the recruitment of a new OD. This stands in contrast to other departments (for example; in logistics, IT, Human Resources or Marketing) where many directors have been in their positions for over 10 years working with different CEOs. Seeing strategy as the work of top managers reflects the FLM’s worldview about the source of strategic directions, and therefore is considered as a general-disposition internal structure.

Two excerpts from the data demonstrate this point. At the time of data collection, Adele wondered how the current CEO/OD team could realise the targets stated in the ongoing strategy statement “which is from 2011 to 2014, right, [so it] has been built with people that are no longer here!” (Adele, FLM). To Adele’s mind, CEOs (and to some extent the OD) are central to setting and clarifying the strategic directions for Optica. Similar to Adele, Laura (FLM) who articulated the strong link between, the leadership skills of the CEO and the OD, on the one hand, and achieving the strategy they set for the organisation through driving and inspiring the FLMs, on the other:

“What they [the new CEO and OD] need to do now is the continuity. This is where we are, this is where we want to be. We’re not going to get there overnight, we’re not going to get there tomorrow. However,

let's tick off the boxes and get us where we want to be, and most people will follow that because you all need a leader... who you believe in and you trust. If you've got a leader who you do not believe in and you do not trust, whether you're a store manager, a regional manager or a director, if the people under you do not believe you and trust you, you've got nothing. It happened before, and we got let down."

(Laura, FLM)

The CEO is seen as the source of strategic direction because they articulate "how to get there" (Sana, FLM). FLMs compared and contrasted different CEOs (and sometimes teams, each being composed of a CEO and an OD) who were in charge of Optica over the past decade or so. The FLMs' belief that the CEO is *the* source of strategic directions restricted their work in a way that supports what the CEO prioritise for the organisation. Each CEO (or team) had their own approach to achieving the declared strategy (Kamal, FLM; Roy, MM; Stacy, FLM), and that approach dictated the focus of the organisation. FLMs reported times where the organisation's strategy was 'results-oriented', therefore when priority was given to financial performance (profit margin and cost control). FLMs contrasted this with other periods where strategy was 'people-oriented' and 'customer-oriented', when training employees and satisfying customers were given the priority over cost control (see also 5.2.4, p.168).

5.3.2 Strategy "depends on what desk you sit behind"

Being positioned at a certain level within the hierarchy lends a different perspective to that person and hence it affects her/his planning scope and horizon:

"So if you're looking from above, you're looking at market share, and you're looking at how big you want to be as a company, and as a

brand. Um, if you break it down, or come to kind of store and management level, then the strategy then becomes [...] about customers, it's about the service, and it's about making sure that we do our best"

(Sana, FLM)

Some FLMs believed that there are two levels to strategy in Optica, one at the centre/top of the organisation and another at the periphery. These two types differ in terms of the scope and the planning horizon.

First, there is an organisation-level strategy, described as a "blanket" and enforced "across the estate" (Zain, FLM). This type of strategy is concerned with standardisation and unification in order for all stores to operate alike and to contribute collectively towards common goals. Strategy documents in Optica indicate a planning horizon of four years (Strategy Statements). However, top managers seem to revise and detail an organisational strategy every year (Katie, MM), announcing their aims, targets and aspirations at the annual conference (Laura, FLM; Kiran, FLM).

Second, each FLM in the peripheries (the stores) develops their own strategy that stems from the higher-level organisation's strategy. This peripheral strategy is guided by the organisation's strategy, but more attuned to the local setting, as Sajan explained: "that gives us two folds isn't it though? You've got the strategy of the company and then you've got your own strategy and how... you're gonna follow the company strategy" (Sajan, FLM). I label setting the strategy at the store level as 'localising' (discussed further in 5.4.2, p.188). The planning horizon of FLMs covers a shorter period, and includes: "this is what we're doing this week, this is what we'll do next week, and then next month" (Sati, FLM).

FLMs justified the existence of these two levels in two ways. First, some FLMs saw this dichotomy stemming from the job description and the work expected (position-practices) of actors at each level: "it's not my job [to do Optica's strategy]... I leave them [the top managers] to do it, and I do the store's strategy in my store" (Lea, FLM). Carol expanded on this:

"I'll leave that to the people at the top. I'm just concentrating on what I'm doing here. It doesn't mean I do not care but it's not my top thing to worry about, you know, I've got too much to worry about here. So yes, the top people want to know what their market share is and want to know how much EBIT profit they're making, but that's what they're there [for]... if I worked up there, that's what my interest would be... I'm only doing my little piece in one little store ... So I do not take a great interest in it, to be honest with you, because that's for them up there. I only take that part that interests in what I do here."

(Carol, FLM)

FLMs' beliefs that strategizing is not part of their, job due to their low hierarchical position, constrained their work in a way that serves the overall organisation's strategy set by top managers.

5.3.3 The importance of strategy

Research participants' beliefs about the importance of strategy were polarised between two extremes. The majority of research participants saw the organisation's strategy as an important and necessary element in their work. Nevertheless, a minority of FLMs dismissed strategy as a theoretical concept, and considered strategizing to be a management exercise with little relevance to the day-to-day work on the shop floor.

Those who believed that an organisation's strategy is a necessary aspect in organisations indicated two reasons for their statement. First, some of those FLMs were able to trace a direct impact of some strategic directions on their daily operations. For example, in 2012 top managers announced that they would like to significantly increase Optica's market share of contact lens wearers. Shortly after, FLMs were asked to allocate an extra five minutes for each eye examination in their diaries. This five minutes allowed optometrists to discuss the possibility of wearing contact lenses with every patient. Interested patients were offered a 'comfort trial'. This practice had an immediate impact on the store's diary by reducing the total number of the eye examinations possible in any given day. Since less eye examinations meant generally less possibilities of generating sales, FLMs were under pressure to increase the sales generated from contact lenses. Here, strategy was considered important because of its impact on the FLMs and staff and their day-to-day work (Personal Experience).

Second, research participants who believed that strategy is important held that strategic directions are essential for the success of Optica. This is because strategy allows non-managerial employees to appreciate and participate in the attainment of the overall organisation's strategy. Hence, many FLMs believed that their subordinates should be aware of Optica's strategy. Shop floor staff are the people on the ground who drive the business and they need to know what are the aims and aspirations of Optica:

"I think it's hugely important; um, they [non-managerial employees] need to know where we want to go as well, as a company, as a store, um, as a region. Every little bit helps, you know. If it means that we want to, drive more contact lens business then, yes, we need to talk more about contact lenses. So who... who sells the contact lenses,

well, those people on the shop floor; so does it affect us? Yes. Does it affect my team? Yes, absolutely!"

(Kiran, FLM)

However, FLMs are constantly facing the challenge of getting their subordinates interested in Optica's strategy. Subordinates, FLMs reported, show interest in the strategy only if it fits with their career aspirations. Indy believed that only one of his staff members, Mathew, is ambitious and working towards becoming a store manager. Hence, Mathew is eager to develop managerial skills and understand strategic issues (Indy, FLM). Adele also reflected this view:

"our strategy is upstairs [displayed] in the tea room as well. I do not know whether they're [staff members] interested. That sounds terrible doesn't it? [...] I think it depends on their outlook of the job, because I've got a couple of ladies that are here to come into work, they do their job and get some wages at the end of the month."

(Adele, FLM)

On the other extreme, several FLMs believed strategy is insignificant for organisations in general, and for Optica in particular. Adam, for example, was cynical and thought that strategies are made and written by companies as a management exercise having no relevance to his position:

"to me I do not wake up in the morning, as a store manager, I think 'I need to preach the strategy of the company to my staff' So is it that important? How important is the strategies of all businesses? So if we look at successful business, Coca-Cola, Apple, Microsoft. You look at all the big corporations. How important is strategy in there? Business, how they strategically position themselves and how they convey those messages? Is it really important that I know what the strategy is for the business? I do not feel like it is."

(Adam, FLM)

Another rationalisation for the insignificance of Optica's strategy came from Sati, who contended that strategy is an abstract concept, far detached from the real world when she is facing her customers:

"There's no point in having a strategy and a strategic approach towards things when it's just sometimes 70 words because do we stick to that strategy?... No, because when you're out in the world, and you're in the frontline and you're working in stores the strategy goes out the window. It really does, because you've got to deal with the... you've got to basically, as and when... you know.... I mean, I walked into the store this morning... to be told that nine Chanel's stolen [a shoplifter stole nine sunglasses of a high-end, luxury brand], need to contact loss prevention; this went wrong because a number of staff's rung in sick. So you kind of like come in... and I had my day planned on the train when I was getting here; those plans have totally gone out of the window..... and I was, like, damn. You know something... with all the best will in the world and all the good intentions it really depends on what you're facing on the day."

(Sati, FLM)

The length of managerial experience does not seem to have any impact on the individual opinion about the importance of strategy within Optica. However, the four participating MMs reported that strategy is important for Optica, and that FLMs need to be aware of the organisation's strategy. Sonia (MM), for instance, said: "I think it's important that they [FLMs] understand the strategy and I think we have to continue talking about the strategy [...] to get through to as many people as possible why we're doing it and the benefit to the company".

FLMs' general-dispositions about the importance of strategy affect their day-to-day work. The majority of FLMs believed that strategy is important for

Optica's success, and therefore conducted their day-to-day work in a way that upholds attaining the organisation's strategy.

5.3.4 Front-Line Managers' professional experience

Previous professional experience of the FLM in Optica and the optical retailing industry accounts for their conjuncture-specific internal structures. Previous experience accumulates tacit knowledge of 1) previously tested-and-worked practices, 2) what areas to be prioritised in the day-to-day work, and 3) what is considered a legitimate practice in Optica and the industry. These conjuncture-specific structures were some of the most difficult ones to unearth in the data because of their tacit nature. However, I was able to illicit these when asking FLMs about their most important job, and when suggesting that they compare current practices and work environment with previous ones.

When asked to name the most important job of the FLM, Indy replied: "I'd say one is analyse business... I think it should be the same with every store" (Indy, FLM). This was in comparison to Kiran (FLM) who adopted a more balanced approach: "I develop my team, I make my sales plan, my KPIs are in order, what do I have to worry about?"; and Sati who illustrated clearly how her previous successful results fed into her current managerial work:

"it's really simple for me and I've always worked along those lines. I do not change; I've not changed that for years. I look after my staff, I would say I'm probably very good at communicating, I have good relationships with people, I would network to ensure that my team or my staff have the best at all times... and in return I expect them to be the same with the customers, they expect a high level of service to good store standards, and hopefully the sales will come."

(Sati, FLM)

For the above reasons, working in different stores is seen as essential to develop certain skills necessary for career progress in the optical retailing context. Laura explained that: “can you work for one store manager and then become a store manager? No. I do not think so, you need to move. A few stores, learn, progress, make your mistakes, inevitably, then move on, and it works.” (Laura, FLM). Managing different stores also allows FLMs to learn from success and failure, in a ‘trial and error’ process:

“I mean it’s all trial and error isn’t it now? in a store that you haven’t been before, you only go back from your experience and how things’d worked... and then just try it, and then if it doesn’t work, then you have to, may have to change your... your mind-set and your behaviour in order to actually... look out of the box for a second and say... let’s try this and let’s try that instead... to see if you can get there”

(Sajan, FLM)

Skills developed from managing different stores makes FLMs sensitive to the specific setting of the different stores. Every location has a unique set of conditions. To be successful, FLMs need to appreciate this locality (Hiba, FLM; Sonia, MM) and maximise the opportunities arising for these unique conditions (a detailed discussion about localising is presented in 5.4.2, p.188).

After gaining experience in multiple stores, FLMs seem to develop a general approach to manage their stores that is reflected in their day-to-day work (see 5.4.1 later in this chapter, p.184). Yeva (FLM), for instance, ‘took over’ a store (an expression used by FLMs to describe taking charge of a store) and immediately noticed that her approach is different from the previous manager. She shortly found out that: “a lot of discounting was going on here” (Yeva, FLM). This is because the previous manager (Oleg) allowed heavy discounting of the

products as long as a higher sales volume was achieved. He (Oleg, FLM) had gained experience managing two stores in less-affluent areas of east London. To Oleg's mind, price was the most important ingredient to succeed, yet Yeva (FLM) on the other hand, was a scientist by training and earned her experience in a top-end flagship store in central London before. She (Yeva, FLM) held that the best way to achieve results is by getting her subordinates to focus on advising customers and providing them with a product best suited to their needs and wants. Both FLMs, the data made clear, had achieved the objectives set by their superior (a regional manager). However, their previous experience led them to legitimise different approaches to their day-to-day work in order to achieve the desired goals.

5.3.5 Summary

To sum up this theoretical construct, internal structures are the participant's transposable skills and generalised worldview (Stones, 2005). They incorporate knowledge of the three aspects of external structures: significations, domination and legitimation (Giddens, 1979, 1984). Internal structures appearing in field data were grouped into four themes:

- Strategy 'depends on who's in charge' (general-dispositions);
- Strategy 'depends on what desk you sit behind' (general-dispositions);
- The importance of strategy (general-dispositions); and
- The FLMs' professional experience (conjuncturally-specific)

The research participants believed that the CEO is the source of the organisation's strategy. They also stipulated that there are two different levels of strategy at Optica: one at the centre/top driven by the top management, and

another at the periphery that is driven by FLMs. Further, most research participants held that strategic direction is important for Optica, and only a small number objected to this. These general-dispositional structures direct the FLMs' work towards attaining common and shared organisational goals and aims. The fourth and final theme reflects the FLMs' professional experience. FLMs develop tacit knowledge by working in different settings. Working in different stores empowers FLMs to grasp the significance of the different store settings, and how they could exploit these local settings.

5.4 Agency and outcomes

Active agency is the dynamic part of the structuration cycle, where internal and external structures are combined (Stones, 2005). In structurationism, agency is the choosing to act, or the acting itself (Giddens, 1979; Stones, 2005). Strategic agency of FLMs in Optica can be traced in their praxis, especially praxis that (explicitly or implicitly) links strategy to the day-to-day work and vice versa. Outcomes, on the other hand, are the effects the structuration cycle has on social structures (both internal and external). Within the research context, these effects were observed in, for example, establishing a new practice in stores, or challenging a previously acquired experience. I combined agency and outcomes under one concept because the two appeared together in the field data, meaning that when participants talked about their strategic agency they routinely considered the consequences of enacting this agency.

This construct grouped three main themes, these are: the day-to-day work of FLMs, FLMs' influence over the organisation, and localising. The various day-to-day tasks of FLMs included managing subordinates, customers, and the

store's performance. FLMs have no role in formulating the organisation's strategy, and the data offers some possible explanations for this. However, FLMs' work is mainly concerned with realising the organisation's strategy. Their strategic agency appears in their localising work, when FLMs adapt the uniform organisational-level practices in a way that conforms to organisational constraints yet responds to and exploits the local setting. This localising praxis is sensitive to internal issues related to the particular dynamic local composition of staff in the store, and external issues related to the local business environment and the local clientele.

5.4.1 The day-to-day work of FLMs

I witnessed FLMs carrying out mundane, daily tasks that are required to run the store. These observations were a reminder of my previous experience whilst working at Optica. FLMs start the morning by opening the store, switching on the computers, making sure the store is clean and tidy, and so on. The majority of FLMs conduct a ten-minute morning briefing, where subordinates "discuss the previous day [...] where we're tracking at in terms of sales and what we've achieved" (Balan, FLM). This morning routine is then followed by getting immersed in the "day-to-day running of the store" which involves an infinite list of activities:

"I've changed light bulbs, I'll, um, fix machinery. I make the staff drinks if they've done particularly well and I need to... if they need some TLC. I take the crap from the customers when they want to yell at somebody, or moan at somebody, which is often. I do the reports that's need to be done. I read my emails, I try and manage the store, I try and do the health and safety reports and make sure it's all done on time. I try and plan the store. I do the rotas, make sure everybody's where they

should be, um, open post, deal with post, do [quality] checking of jobs... I'm jack of all trades... master of none"

(Laura, FLM)

FLMs found spelling out a specific list of tasks challenging because they saw themselves responsible for "everything [and] everyone that walks through the door" (Yevea, FLM). However, FLMs' priority is to be "more present on the shop floor, as opposed to in the office, because that's the best way to run your shop" (Sana, FLM). Therefore, FLMs "do not want to be reading 50 emails" (Laura, FLM). Being present on the shop floor is important because it helps FLMs to "make sure that the day-to-day running of the store is smooth" (Sajan, FLM). When present on the shop floor, FLMs talk to customers, solve problems, sign papers, monitor conduct, observe behaviour, train and coach others, organise, command, sell, discuss with employees, phone Head Office (HO), chase up suppliers, and the list goes on.

FLMs' day-to-day work aims to manage two broad areas, these are: people (both employees and customers) and results (as an indication of commercial performance).

FLMs thought of their main job as "managing my people, supporting them, and developing them" (Sana, FLM), and they saw explaining and engaging subordinates as an essential practice in their work:

"if you try to implement things in-store without justifying the changes that you're making, you're doing it blindly and you're expecting people to just walk with you, and you can't do that. You have to explain, you have to communicate the reasons why, so [they] have a good understanding of it. And when they're doing it they can justify what

they're doing and why they're doing it, and they can see a benefit in that change"

(Sati, FLM).

Engaging employees in the minute, day-to-day work is also important. Jack (FLM), for instance, explained: "if they [subordinates] know through their direct actions... that they can have a massive impact in the business; they'll probably take more care on what they do." (Jack, FLM).

Dealing with customers is another big part of FLMs' day-to-day work: "customers are [the] absolute top of the list" (Sana, FLM). FLMs make it their business to "say hello to customers" (Abby, FLM), "look at the experience of the customer on a daily basis" (Adam, FLM) and ensure that the staff "serve my customers" (Laura, FLM). FLMs are routinely called into situations where customer satisfaction is not achieved. Indeed, all complaints are dealt with by FLMs (Lea, FLM), even those sent directly to the customer service team at the head office (Abby, FLM). Most FLMs also play the 'pivot' role in the store: they stand at the front desk orchestrating the movement of customers and directing them to the right place such as when Malek said: "have a seat in the waiting area and the optometrist will call you in shortly" to one customer (Malek, FLM). FLMs also caught up managing the 'queue' when there are more customers than employees, FLMs often address customers and say to them: "if you start browsing the frames on this side and I'll get somebody across to help you as soon as possible" (Lahar, FLM). In each step of the interaction between patients and the company, "customers are the number one priority" and the overarching philosophy is: "customer is king" (Stacy, FLM).

In addition to dealing with and managing people, FLMs' day-to-day work involves active management of results and performance. FLMs perform an "analysis [of the] business" (Indy, FLM) which include monitoring sales figures and other KPIs:

"I do track my figures, not just sales figures but certain other figures like second pair dispenses, DER [Dispensed Exam Rate, a KPI widely used in the industry], things like that to make sure that we're consistently hitting it and increasing on it month to month. We do have a monthly report and I can compare it to the previous year and so to see how much we've improved on certain areas, if we have dropped, where have we dropped, how we can improve and things like that."

(Balan, FLM)

The store's performance is measured by various KPIs. Many of these KPIs are available to all staff through the information system used by Optica to handle customers' records and transactions. Nevertheless, these KPIs are discussed every morning: "we have a little meeting every morning with my team, with the KPIs from the day before so they know how much we did yesterday, what our DER is, all the KPIs, [and] what I'd like our plan to be for the day" (Adele, FLM). These KPIs help FLMs monitor the store's profitability and performance (for example, number of new customers, number of visitors, number of transactions, and the average value of transactions). The system is able to generate about fifty-odd different performance indicators, out of which, only a few are prioritised by top managers at the annual conference (see 5.2.3 earlier in this chapter, p.167).

Many FLMs related the two areas (people and results) in the following manner. Managing and dealing with people is necessary to achieve results,

because a happy employee and a happy customer leads to achieving good results:

“Because everything that you do ultimately goes down to [results], doesn’t it? So how you get to that is all the above, isn’t it really? So you get the associates trained so they’ll be selling the right products and deliver the best customer service... You’ve got the sales coming through. [And you make sure that] you’ve protected the controllable... if it’s a remake or a refund why is this, is it something we can stop... and then use that as training tools as well to make sure that your associates are happy, motivated through your day-to-day. Stuff like that so that they continue to sell and be more enthused about, say, delivering that customer service and then... and then the money comes in and then the money goes out and then whatever the difference is what you ultimately are judged upon”

(Sajan, FLM)

To Raji’s mind, this was the only rational connection: “that’s ultimately what we’re here for because every business is there to make money and make profit” (Raji, FLM).

5.4.2 FLMs’ influence over the organisation

FLMs believed that their opinion does not count when it comes to formulating Optica’s strategy, despite being the ones responsible for delivering it. FLMs’ work is more concerned with realising strategic directions set by the top managers. Even then, this strategy-realising work is done within certain limits set by the centre/top. In addition, FLMs provide feedback to their superiors and the HO with the intention of improving performance, correcting mistakes or avoiding problems. However, they remain uninformed about the fate of any suggestions they make or initiatives they propose.

When FLMs were asked about how they perceive their role in Optica's strategy, most of them asserted that they have no role to play in strategy-formulation. FLMs felt alienated from the process: "I do not think you have any say on it [strategy]. I think that's all them up there [top managers] sitting round their thing, discussing what they want and how they're going to do it. I do not think I have any say in it at all." (Carol, FLM). Kedar also expressed his feelings about a recent meeting with the CEO, during which FLMs were supposedly invited to engage in discussing Optica's strategic direction:

"I, I do not think they've taken [the] store managers' viewpoint into consideration, I think they've come in and said, you know what, this is [the] areas that we need to look at. ... I do not think they took feedback from the [store] managers or anything, I just think they looked at it as a company and be like, this is what we need to do, this is what we're going to implement. And then they got us in a room, had a chat, and well basically said, at the end of the day this is what we're doing."

(Kedar, FLM)

Not taking FLMs' opinions on board, Laura believed, is a big mistake highlighting the important role of FLMs are in executing the strategy:

"I think execs [top managers] avoid listening to store managers because we're the ones that have to execute it. You can make as many decisions as you want, but the people who are going to execute it are your store managers on the shop floor."

(Laura, FLM)

FLMs subsequently believed that their role is essential in realising the projected strategy. This is achieved through positioning themselves as the connecting point between Optica, the centre/top and the 300-store organisation, and the store they manage:

"I would say they [top managers], they, kind of use us as the key drivers to the, to the process really. Once they've rolled [the strategy] out, and then it's obviously... I'll be responsible to go back to roll it out to our team, to explain to them, obviously what we've discussed, what the new objectives are, and what we aim to do over the next, over, you know, the remainder of the year... So that our job actually, is to maintain that we try and stick to the strategy that the company wants us to do. That's our job at the end of the day"

(Madin, FLM)

However, realisation of strategy is, according to FLMs, constrained by many limitations imposed by Optica. The centre/top seeks uniformity among stores and creates rules to be imposed "across the estate" (Zain, FLM). The importance of uniformity across store is acknowledged and appreciated by the FLMs (Lea, FLM). Nevertheless, FLMs saw these as a burden that stops them from unlocking the potential of their stores (Stacy, FLM).

FLMs were frustrated with their inability to change these imposed, limiting, organisational, uniform practices. Optica's senior and middle managers constantly asked FLMs for feedback and internal documents state that an 'open door' policy is in place to encourage peripheries to bring up any issues with higher ranks. FLMs however felt otherwise:

"It's frustrating, because you give your feedback; you think, okay, I've tried it the way they wanted it to. I can see it's not working. I would recommend this... when it's not done, you do feel frustrated, they do not listen to you"

(Madin, FLM)

Sati even felt unappreciated at times:

"I do not always think my opinion counts... I do not necessarily think they [top managers] think for the shop level. I think a lot of theories are quite good, but not always theories go into practice well. ... They are very good at telling you when you've done bad, but not always good at recognising when you've done well, even on a day-to-day basis ... and you just feel, you know, unappreciated"

(Sati, FLM)

One contributing factor to feeling ignored, the data suggests, is the lack of knowledge about how FLMs' feedback is treated. FLMs never know if a new initiative or any new policy or procedure is the result of some feedback provided by a peer:

"you would never know that it was you that said it. You would never know that it came from you, or you helped, or... Do you know what I mean? Which I suppose is a bit of a shame, really, because there will be people out there, other store managers, that have probably come up with really good ideas... but nobody will probably go back and say that person was the one"

(Sana, FLM)

For instance, I witnessed the implementation of a strategic initiative whilst collecting data. This organisation-wide initiative aimed at increasing Optica's market share of contact lens wearers. The contact lens manager was recognised as the source of the idea at organisational level, and he won an internal award for this initiative. However, one store manager told me that this initiative was his idea originally:

"The original idea of that came from what I was doing in here [store]. I do not know if he [the contact lens manager] has acknowledged that it's come from there. But he's taken that concept and developed it

massively forward. And put things in place that I've never thought off. And but then introduced it into the business. And he won an award for it. I feel a bit aggrieved so I've not had any recognition for the fact that it was me doing it first... c'est la vie."

(Adam, FLM)

Jack (FLM) did not know what Adam had mentioned during the interview, but he (Jack) stated that the: "[contact lenses initiative] is something that I'm assuming was somebody's brainchild, I can almost guarantee that it did not come from above" (Jack, FLM).

5.4.3 Localising

Successful FLMs are skilful in understanding their local territory and what is best done to capitalise on the local environment. This seems to be a vital task for FLMs. This 'localising' is a process of

"breaking it down minutely to your business, because Optica is vast and huge and it's so wide-spread throughout the nation, I can't talk about how Leicester's going to do their business or what their situation is, I can only see what I can deal with here [in this store]. And it's a small part of a pie, but hopefully that will help towards the... the overall goal"

(Hiba, FLM)

Earlier, it was discussed how FLMs distinguished between two types of strategies in Optica: an organisation-wide strategy set by the top/centre, and a local strategy set by the FLMs at the peripheries (5.3.2, p.174). Localising is the strategizing praxis through which the local level is set. FLMs did not see this localising as a complete departure from the overall strategy: "the ultimate strategy is what the company wants you to do, but how you do it is, I guess, like-for-like or being specific to... so the ultimate goal has to be the same but how you

implement it, well... may be different" (Sajan, FLM). Hence, the FLMs strategic agency manifested in "tweaking" (Jack, FLM) and elaborating on the organisation-wide practices to better fit the local settings.

One clear example appears in the data as FLMs spoke about local marketing offers. Subject to middle and senior management approval, FLMs are able to run up to six local promotions (out of 27 options available) of their choice at any given time (Hiba, FLM). Adele (FLM) discussed how she attracts senior citizens using a special discount in a town where the majority of the inhabitants are retired; and Jack (FLM) talked about advertising student discounts in a busy, student-intensive city centre location. Localising, nevertheless, goes beyond price discounts: Sana (FLM) was noted to have advertised the availability of an eye examination in front of the store, whilst Amanda (FLM) used a street board to attract customers who got their eyes tested at another optician but postponed their purchase. Also, Kedar (FLM) simplified the display of the products in his store as local clientele found the original display, planned by the HO, confusing. These practices do not exist universally across all the stores; they were selected, sometimes invented and executed by individual FLM to maximise on the opportunities arising within the local setting. Two extensive examples are provided below (p.199).

This localising process is the source of tension within Optica between the centre/top and the local level. On the one hand, at the centre, top managers and HO departments work hard to get all stores to look and feel the same, creating a uniform brand image and organisational practices. They (HO employees and top managers) seek to harmonise procedures, products and services to reduce complexity and establish uniformity. The importance of establishing uniformity

was evident in one of the Monthly Regional Meetings (MRMs), during which the new Operations Directors named and shamed those FLMs who were not enforcing Optica's standard store 'look' within their stores.

FLMs, on the other hand, reasoned that such uniformity might only be possible in common commodity retailing such as clothes and shoes. Optical retailing is more subjective, they argued, not only because it has a clinical side, but also because the spectacles one wears conveys a personal statement. Carol (FLM) commented: "when [the OD] came here for his brief visit the other day, he was comparing us with, um, stockings that they had [the OD worked in a supermarket beforehand], tights and things, and how they lay things out, but it's not the same" (Carol, FLM). The sales encounters must be highly personalised (Stacy, FLM; Amanda, FLM), and the store environment and products must be attuned to local clientele.

In addition to the local commercial setting, internal issues make it impossible for all stores to look the same:

"You can't make the staff all look the same because they're all individuals, but you can stick them in the same uniforms. Some of them will look smart; some of them will look like a bag of shit. That's individual people. In optics, we've got different stores with different concepts [internal design] so they're not going to look the same. Different stores with different layouts, so they aren't going to look the same. Different stores with different frame selections, they're not going to look the same. So you've lost it already because you can't make every store look the same if they've got different frame bars, if they've got a different look about them, if they've got different computers, different chairs, you've lost it."

(Laura, FLM)

Localising appears embedded in the day-to-day details. In particular, FLMs take account of: 1) their local team and 2) their local business environment when localising. An interesting link emerges here as these two localising aspects overlap with the two areas managed by FLMs in their day-to-day mundane workflow (people and results, 5.4.1 (p.184) above).

5.4.3.1 Localising and team dynamics

FLMs particularly cited the social characteristics and the size of the team as factors affecting their localising praxis.

Each store has a unique composition of employees in terms of their age, training, career aspirations and so forth. FLMs are fully aware of this uniqueness when they experience managing different stores: “different teams work in different ways. You have to work out what’s good for your team” (Laura, FLM). FLMs, as a result, elaborate Optica’s strategy in a way suitable for their team: “I put it [strategy] in basic, nice, sort of, easy terms that they [staff] would understand as well... [because some of them] just want to come into work, do their job, and then go home.” (Indy, FLM). Equally, understanding of the particular characteristics of their team allows FLMs to adopt appropriate local practices. For example, Madin explained how he uses SMS messages to communicate with his staff:

“because I have quite a young store [of subordinates], text messages are brilliant. You send them a text to announce that this promotion is launching, or keep an eye on this, and they... you know they always know it and plus you can always confirm you’ve received it as well, because they always acknowledge it. So, it’s a good little tool.”

(Madin, FLM)

Additionally, the size of the store influences the harmony and coherence of the team. Larger stores are more departmentalised and consequently work specialisation is higher. Staff members in smaller teams, on the other hand, are required to multi-task and are usually more flexible. Yeva's experience offers a good example. She (Yeva, FLM) worked in two different stores, the first with over 50 employees and the second with less than 20. Employees in the large store declined to perform tasks outside their specialisation, so sales assistants were not willing to help the reception desk, and the laboratory technicians refused to answer the phone. She found managing the smaller team more interesting because: "there's more sort of team spirit. I think that's the thing that working with a small team... they help each other out. They'll do everything to get the job done; there's a great solidarity between them" (Yeva, FLM). Hence, stores with different sizes require different local approaches to do the same task. For example, Sana explained how the size of her store affects the manner in which she approaches coaching and on-the-job training practices:

"I know some [bigger] stores do like a training thing on a Saturday, because of the size of our store, and we're all so close, and we kind of share everything all the time, we do not need to have a dedicated hour and a half to talk about things we've always talked about all week."

(Sana, FLM).

5.4.3.2 Localising and the local commercial environment

FLMs reported that understanding the local commercial settings is essential to their success in their day-to-day work. Two aspects of this commercial environment were particularly present in the data: the local clientele and the surrounding business environment in terms of competition and location.

FLMs pay great attention to the demographic qualities of the local clientele, such as age, race and social background. This allows FLMs to localise the commercial message to fit their local customers: “if you’ve got more NHS-based patients [the NHS covers the cost of spectacles for low-income patients] then you have to... change the way you do it” (Sajan, FLM). Further, norms of local customers have detrimental consequences on the running of the store, as Kedar experienced in an area where customers are used to booking appointments and not turning up:

“I’d say... 30% of our patients won’t show up even though you, you text them, you call them... It does allow us to take walk-ins [customers who do not have a pre-booked appointment]... I think somewhere like [this store], we do not deal with [many customers] to be honest [...] one single person makes such a big difference to our day [i.e. in terms of sales]... so we have to go through all that and mention it [reminding patients of their appointment multiple times] just because it makes a difference”

(Kedar, FLM)

Another FLM justified the high number of complaints in his store quoting the demanding local clientele:

“I think it’s the culture of the area, you know; the Asian culture, the African culture around here, it’s just how their mentality is, which is fine, and obviously, we try and, you know, aim to keep them happy all the time, but generally, you know, you could, you know, miss a phone call by a ring, and they complain and you have to apologise, but, you know, to them it’s a big deal. And if it’s a big deal to them, then you, you should make it a big deal [for] you to apologise”

(Madin, FLM)

In addition to customers, FLMs discussed the surrounding business environment as an important factor in their day-to-day running of the store. For instance, being located in a busy shopping centre meant that: “we’re fortunate and that we’ve got the footfall, so we do not have to struggle” (Yeva, FLM). In such a case, the day-to-day work of FLMs becomes less concerned with attracting new customers into the store, and more with “converting browsers to buyers” (Adele, FLM). Additionally, the neighbouring stores seem to influence the type and the number of potential customers: “I walk around all the time... I’ve got six units closed within this high street... cost of parking escalates, people [now] need a reason why they need to come to [the local area]” (Hiba, FLM). Kedar was able to compare two contrasting environments for the two stores he worked in:

“The local environment [means] first of all, the appearance of the place, I mean, how you walk down [location 1], obviously, and you walk down [location 2], very different.. um, you know... the actual stores that surround you in [location 2], several stores have closed down and been replaced with, like, pound shops or 99p shops or, you know, those value shops... in [location 1] you’ve got that sort of small circle where it’s very high end.”

(Kedar, FLM)

Finally, gaining experience through managing different stores positively influences FLMs’ awareness of their role in localising the strategy to the local environment. For example, Carol, Abby and Lea had extensive experience with Optica, but only managed one store. Their discussion of localisation was minimal and they did not see this as important when compared to Sajan, Indy and Laura’s accounts who had managed multiple stores in different locations.

5.4.4 Two detailed localising examples

Two localising examples from the data are offered, one of a successful localising and another of an unsuccessful one.

The first example is of successful localising. In 2011, Optica wanted to enforce its position as a high quality and innovative optician, and therefore rolled out a new service: taking a photo of the retina as a part of the eye examination (called a fundus image). This involved considerable investments for stores to buy the necessary machine and to train staff. Top and middle managers decided that the service should be optional, and incur an additional fee on top of the eye examination fees. If a patient chose to include the fundus image, their eye examination fee rose by 50%. Back then, Kiran (FLM) knew that asking his patients to pay an extra fee to take a photo of their retina was going to put his local clientele off as early as when they are booking an appointment, as they are told about the fees at that stage. The local customers are very price sensitive due to modest income levels and the knock-on effect of the economic crisis. Indeed, Optica's local competitors did not charge for this particular service. Kiran knew that he needed to localise, offering this service (fundus image) free of charge contradicting the requirement set by the centre/top.

At a personal level, Kiran (FLM) believed that FLMs have an important role to play if Optica is to achieve its strategic targets. FLMs' priority, he mentioned, is to attain the targets assigned to their own store. If every FLM attains her/his set targets, he argued, Optica would realise the overall organisation-level strategic targets. In 2011, the focus in Optica was primarily on financial performance, and achieving a set of KPIs was the priority for every FLM. One of

these prioritised KPIs, called Dispensed Exams Rate (DER), measures how many customers buy a product after having an eye examination.

With the introduction of the fundus image in Kiran's store, the DER dropped considerably. Kiran believed that customers are buying less because they are put off by being asked to pay the extra fee at the beginning of their visits during the eye examination. Therefore, providing this service free of charge, like his local competitors, is necessary if the store is to achieve its DER targets. Kiran did not request the annulation of the fee from his superior immediately. In his experience, rushing into such requests does not work, especially at those times when Optica was headed by a CEO whose main focus was on increasing profit margins. Kiran waited until the drop in DER became consistent over a few weeks. He then put forward an argument to his superior that the drop is a consequence of introducing the fundus image fees. Potential customers, he claimed, are not going ahead with booking appointments and/or not going ahead with purchasing glasses because the extra fee is creating an impression of overpriced services and products. Kiran (FLM) also collected comments from price-sensitive local customers to support his argument. The argument progressed for Kiran's request to drop the additional fee and provide the fundus image free of charge for his patients. In return, Kiran promised that the DER set level will be achieved if his request is granted. Shortly after, a top manager (the Operations Director at that time) approved Kiran's request to provide the fundus image service free of charge only in this store, as long as Kiran is able to increase his DER.

In this example, Kiran (FLM) successfully negotiated with the centre/top to exempt his customers from paying for a particular service (fundus image), and to offer this service free of charge in his store contrary to other Optica stores. Kiran

(FLM) acted within the constraining conditions as priority was given to KPIs (external structures being: I have an important role in achieving the strategic targets, the current CEO is prioritising performance) and according to his previous experience (internal structures have an enabling effect: I should justify my localisation request by clarifying its impact on what the current person in charge thinks is most important, the DER at the time) to successfully localise (outcomes of the cycle being changing the uniform organisation-wide practice) according to his locale (commercial environment).

The second example is of an unsuccessful localising process. Stacy (FLM) believed that Optica's ultimate mission is to provide the best service for its customers. The best service will lead to acquiring and retaining more customers, and hence reaching the (strategically) desired market growth and financial objectives. Everything she does is guided by providing customers with the best service. However, she kept in mind that in 2012, the new bosses (CEO and OD) focused on uniformity across stores. One of these uniform practices was to provide each non-buying customer a quotation, and then call that customer on the following day to see if they would like to go ahead with the purchase. The calls were to be made in non-busy trading hours so the practice does not require any extra staff or affect the performance of the store.

Stacy's (FLM) store is located in an area populated by companies and offices near a major underground station. Hence, almost all her clientele are working employees who are unlikely to pick up the phone or discuss a purchase on weekdays. The lunch break is when this clientele might pick up their phones. Stacy (FLM), however, is unable to dedicate a member of staff to contact

customers during this period (the lunch break) because it is the busiest period in the day and staff must attend to serving the customers in the store. Stacy (FLM) firmly believed that it was necessary to localise this practice to her local environment. Calling customers who were provided with a quotation during the weekend would be the best way to adapt this organisation-wide practice to her local environment. This is justified, Stacy claimed, because 1) the store is open and not busy during the weekend (being located in a business area) and 2) customers are likely to have the time to respond and discuss their purchase. Stacy (FLM) raised the issue with her boss, putting forward the above arguments. She has done this before and thought that her request was reasonable. To her surprise, Stacy (FLM) was told that top managers are currently concerned with establishing uniformity across stores and are not willing to make any exceptions. Stacy continued to call her customers next day as requested by the company, knowing that almost none of these customers will answer the phone.

In this second example, Stacy (FLM) wanted to phone her customers during the weekend to discuss their incomplete purchase, but the uniform practice in Optica dictated calling customers on the day following their visit. Stacy is very aware of the importance of localising because of her long experience “it just doesn’t work here”, because her customers are busy working and are unable to pick up the phone during regular working hours. Additionally, calling customers during the lunch break was not an option as her staff were busiest during lunch hours and priority must be given to customers who were already in the store. Despite her disagreement with the uniform practice, and clear argumentation with the centre/top, she was unable to adapt this practice, thereby to localise, because the new top management team established building uniformity across store as an

absolute necessity at the time. These pressing conditions (external structures) constrained Stacy's ability to localise (act her strategic agency), despite her attempt to draw on her experience (internal structures).

5.4.5 Summary

FLMs' day-to-day work is rather diverse, and includes an extended list of mundane tasks. Broadly speaking, these nitty-gritty tasks manage two aspects: people (clientele and subordinate) and results (an indication of commercial performance of the store). FLMs believed that managing the first area is very important to conquer the second.

The direct impact of FLMs' work is limited to their respective stores. Despite their feedback, they are unaware whether their initiatives and feedback influence the entire organisation. Further, they have no direct influence or say in formulating Optica's strategy. FLMs are, however, active and vital participants in realising the organisation's strategy.

In Optica, FLMs exhibit their strategic agency mainly through localising praxis. This localising praxis consists of many practices, including localising according to the local clientele; the local commercial environment; the social characteristics of the store's employees and to the size of the team. This section concluded with two thorough examples, one of a successful localisation and another of an unsuccessful one.

5.5 FLMs in the flow of position-practices

Stones (2005, p.63) explains position-practices as: “institutionalised position, positional identities, and sense of prerogatives and obligation”. A social praxis is better understood, Stones argues, when situated within a flow of position-practices.

In this research, the main context was set to Optica, the case study organisation (see chapter three, p.84). Chapter three discussed the position-practice relations with some external actors, such as regulatory bodies and competitors (3.2, p.84). The discussion in this chapter zooms in on the FLMs' immediate context, and the position-practices relations within Optica.

Four main social actor (position-practices) types emerged from the data: Regional Managers (RMs), fellow FLMs, subordinates and Head Office (HO) departments. The agents-in-focus (the FLMs) have different relations with these agents-in-context. As these relations are explicated, it became evident that they are not only of a hierarchical nature, but also of a social one. Lastly, due to the geographical distances between the centre/top and the peripheries in Optica, communications appear to play an important part in creating and sustaining the position-practice relations in Optica in addition to communicating various strategic and non-strategic issues.

5.5.1 The relations between FLMs and other actors-in-context

In considering the different actors that FLMs deal with on a day-to-day basis, four main categories of social actors emerged from the data. These are: Regional Managers (RMs), subordinates (or staff members), fellow FLMs and HO departments.

5.5.1.1 Relations with the regional manager

RM is a middle manager position (Figure 3-2, p.89) and each RM manages around 20 stores defined usually in a certain geographical area. The relationship between the FLMs and their superior, the RM, is affected by the personal approach of the individual RM. Hence, the social aspect of this relation is as important as the hierarchical one. Further, the repetitive internal restructuring meant that FLMs receive far less support from their RM.

RMs are the direct line managers of FLMs. The personal relationship between an FLM and his/her RM is important because FLMs need to be at ease in seeking advice and guidance from their RM. Laura had noticed this over her career:

"it's a personality thing. I had a regional manager previously who I haven't got on with, and I wouldn't go to him for anything... you need a regional manager who's not going to judge you as being incompetent or weak just because you have an opinion of... view things not necessarily be as they think."

(Laura, interview)

FLMs believed that it is the job of their RMs to offer them support in their day-to-day work and other aspects of their career. However, FLMs felt that the help and support they receive from the RMs is inadequate. Abby (FLM) cited a recent example where she needed the support from her RM:

"I just want to know that if I make my, the decision, that someone is going to say, even if I think it's the wrong decision, they'll still [be] going to back me up with whatever decision I make, I want someone there as a backup to support me."

(Abby, FLM)

When this support issue was discussed with the regional managers, they openly confessed that supporting all FLMs in the region is very difficult at times because they are responsible for a large number of stores (18-22 stores) (Katie, MM), which are often dispersed over a large geographical area (Isaac, MM). Some FLMs were able to appreciate this justifying: “RMs are very busy people” (Carol, FLM) and therefore unable to follow-up and keep a continuous connection with all stores in the region at the same time (Sati, FLM). RMs’ time seems to be consumed by those stores that are struggling to achieve satisfactory performance or “firefighting” as Katie (MM) described it. Lahar (FLM) recalled a conversation he had with his RM during his personal yearly evaluation: “[my regional manager told me that] you’re doing well, there is no point in me coming here, telling you what to do, when I got four or five other stores that need to be, you know, need to be directed more” (Lahar, FLM).

This highlights the importance of FLMs in driving the day-to-day business in Optica. Being busy and responsible for many stores, RMs are there to respond to emergencies, and they do not intervene in the day-to-day work of FLMs as long as they (FLMs) are ‘doing well’.

5.5.1.2 Relations with fellow FLMs

In addition to the RMs, FLMs interact and establish social relations with fellow FLMs, especially in the same region. Many FLMs felt that establishing these social, personal relationships is important in creating a support network around them. Kedar, for instance, took a new-year resolution to actively establish relations with other colleagues in the region: “if you do not make the contacts, you know, then people won’t naturally come to support you as well, so you have

to make that base” (Kedar, FLM). This support is an important aspect of organisational life: “there’s always colleagues around as well, there’s other store managers that you can phone, you know, if you’re not sure, so, you know, that’s what I’ve always done really... I feel freely able to pick up the phone and speak to any of these guys” (Kiran, FLM). Indeed the researcher witnessed Stacy calling upon help from other stores when she was faced with an unanticipated staff shortage (Stacy, FLM), and Adele calling upon the help of her colleagues when interpreting and executing some incomplete instructions from the head office (Adele, FLM). In fact, FLMs called each other almost on a daily basis:

“we just pick up the phone and have a chat... I have my local store X [name of a nearby store], which is down the road from here [both stores are in London], so we talk, you know, we talk once a day, twice a day, to see how things are going [in terms of KPIs], and how can we help each other out. It’s a good line of communication. It benefits us both. You know, it, it helps build friendship, as well”

(Madin, FLM)

This seemingly intensive networking is more a personal affair rather than an institutionally encouraged practice, as Sati clarified:

“if I want to call upon someone for a favour I know I can pick up the phone, and nine times out of ten I’m quite confident if I need staff, if I need something, I’ll get that support. But that’s not through Optica, that’s because I’ve done the networking myself, I’ve built relationships with people and I can do that”

(Sati, FLM)

Seeking to create a support network and share information, FLMs establish and sustain communications with colleagues, especially those who are geographically close to one another.

5.5.1.3 Relations with subordinates

The third type of social actor present in the data is subordinates. FLMs call upon and value support from their staff. The ability of an FLM to concentrate on developing the business in their store appears to rely greatly on the amount of support they get from their staff. Indy (FLM) explained how his assistant manager will prepare a full report for him when he (Indy) is absent, making it Indy's job to analyse the data rather than collecting them. Laura envied her colleague for having a good assistant, which then allowed that colleague to concentrate on developing the business side of the store:

"Now, [another FLM name] is in a position where he's got two very good ASMs and if your ASMs can do and be like you, it makes a huge difference. When I was at Bedford, I had Liza, who is my ex-ASM, my life was wonderful. And I never knew how wonderful until now... because we could back each other up because I knew her and I knew what she'd do and I knew what she wouldn't do... When I was at Cambridge, I did not have that at all. So I had to do everything which was draining"

(Laura, FLM)

Having a supportive team in the store allows time for FLM to analyse the local environment and strategize to develop the business locally (Zain, FLM; Indy, FLM).

5.5.1.4 Relations with the HO

Lastly, FLMs and other research participants discussed at length the relationship between the HO (centre/top) and the stores (peripheries). The data reveals a strong tension between the HO and the stores. FLMs and other store employees in Optica did not feel a unity with their counterparts at the HO.

HO functions include centralised business services such as marketing, product, logistics and so forth, which is common amongst multi-unit enterprises. These services, as Raji explained, have an indirect influence on the day-to-day running of the store:

“Obviously they [HO] are a support mechanism... You know, things like admin, NHS, that kind of thing, you know, they take care of. Obviously product they look after your frames and what you’re displaying and, you know, what should be on your shelves, shouldn’t be on your shelves, what needs to be sent back, what doesn’t. So, yes, they have an influence in the operation of the store in terms of the running of the store... I guess with accounts they provide your KPIs and your P&L so you can assess them and you can influence and in that way, you know that there’s a certain area where potentially you’ve got a downfall and you need to... you need to pick that up. Then yeah, I guess they have that kind of influence”

(Raji, FLM)

FLMs exposed a strong division between ‘us’ (store employees) and ‘them’ (HO departments and employees). This was very clear in Sati’s interview, when she claimed that peripheral employees are able to do the job of the HO staff, but not the reverse:

“people in head office are sitting in an office looking at reports and being analytical. They’re actually not in stores; they do not even know what goes on in a store; they do not even know how a store would run. If we would let them loose in a store do you honestly think they would know what to do? No, they wouldn’t because you know something they do not know how we work. But if you put us in head office, because we have an understanding of how things work, we’d probably be quite effectively and be able to do their jobs for them.”

(Sati, FLM)

One possible reason behind this tension is that the HO staff do not visit the stores. Sati made it clear that direct experience and personal interaction cannot be omitted and replaced by other means:

“You can’t do it remotely. You know something, I could shout, scream, rant and rave down the phone - does it mean anything? If you’re doing that in person and you’ve had that face-to-face conversation, you’ve been in the store, you’ve witnessed everything at first hand, your conversation means so much more than having a conversation over the telephone. It doesn’t happen.”

(Sati, FLM)

HO’s departments have an indirect impact on the day-to-day work of FLMs through the support functions these departments carry out. However, there is a strong division between the centre/top and the peripheries, adding to the tension identified earlier (5.4.3, p.192). This tension is rooted in the HO seeking uniformity while the FLMs seek localisation. FLMs believe that the geographical distance adds to this tension.

Summary - the relationship between FLMs and other social actors in context

Presenting the relationships between FLMs and the other four main types of actors in the immediate context (RMs, subordinates, fellow FLMs and HO departments) situates the strategic agency of FLMs within a web of position-practice relations. RMs are not concerned with the mundane day-to-day work of FLMs, including localising, and they (RMs) will intervene only if problems arise. The support of the subordinate is important in the day-to-day work of FLMs, and competent subordinates require less supervision, therefore freeing time for FLMs to develop the store by seizing local opportunities. FLMs maintain a support

network among their peers, sharing experience and information, especially in their regional clusters. Finally, the division in identity between the HO staff and the shop floor staff further increased the tension between the centre/top (seeking uniformity) of Optica and the peripheries (seeking localisation).

5.5.2 Communications

The field data indicates that FLMs receive and send information through various channels including: emails, memos, a weekly newsletter, the annual store managers' conference, monthly regional meetings and during store visits from top managers. Communication carries, on the one hand, operational instructions and strategic directions from the HO (centre/top) to the stores (peripheries) and, on the other, information and feedback from the stores to RMs and HO. Two types of communication channels emerged from the data. The first carries information without direct social interaction, which I refer to as 'non-interactive communications'. The second includes richer social interaction, which I label 'interactive communications'.

5.5.2.1 Non-interactive communication channels

Non-interactive communication channels in Optica include internal emails, memos and a weekly newsletter. These channels are used predominantly to communicate operational day-to-day issues: "we get communications, but they're normally like day-to-day things, but with regards to like strategy and things, not really." (Abby, FLM). The only exception appears to be the staffroom posters where strategy is 'advertised' internally. FLMs questioned the large amount of information they receive in this format. Jack concluded that most of the information included in the documents irrelevant to him:

“they will give a pack, and what you have to do is try and filter out the stuff that you do not really care about, which to be honest is most of it. emm, I do not really care what goes on else wher[e]... for the most part, I'd say 10 per cent's valid to the store [and] 90 per cent is just information that is [not very] useful,”

(Jack, FLM)

Emails are the main daily communication channel between the stores and other parts of the company (HO and RMs). However, FLMs seem to be overwhelmed with the amount of emails they receive: “I get emails. it's her [the FLM is referring to their RM] favourite at the moment. She'll email five, six, seven times a day and to me, I just- I do not need it.” (Abby, FLM).

Printed memos arrive with the daily delivery, and can be viewed by all staff. These include operational instructions like how to re-price products; marketing materials such as posters; and some printed materials to be displayed in the staff area.

The weekly newsletter is prepared by the marketing and strategy department at the HO, and has grown from four pages in 2011 to 15 pages by the end of 2012. Every newsletter typically outlines important events in the following week (for example payroll deadlines and marketing campaigns), training events and locations announcements, details of any incentives, up-to-date information about products, the store league table (in terms of selected KPIs), vacant positions, and so on (internal documents).

Non-interactive communications, then, are rarely used to explicitly communicate Optica's strategy or otherwise any strategic direction. For instance, the weekly newsletter includes a table of the top performing stores in terms of

EBIT (appears on the official strategy statement), but this table does not refer to the planned strategic target of 15% by 2014.

5.5.2.2 Interactive communication channels

Unlike non-interactive communications, interactive communications involve live, instantaneous interactions between two or more social agents. The organisation's strategy in Optica is communicated through these channels. In-person communication of strategy and strategic issues takes place during the annual store managers' conference, the monthly regional MRM, and unannounced store visits from top managers.

First, the annual store managers' conference is an important event in the life of Optica. Every February, FLMs are invited to the two-day event to meet with their colleagues from across the country. FLMs also meet the senior management team and some key HO staff. A strict bow-tie dress code is in effect to signify the importance of the event (Malek, FLM). The event is used as a networking occasion (Sana, FLM), a celebration of successes (Lahar, FLM; Kamal, FLM) and a look back at what went wrong or not as expected (Abby, FLM).

"I think the conference evaluates where we've been for the last year. It's just like any meeting really, you review your performance. You look at what did well and you look at what did not do so well and then you tell everyone what you want them to do and how we're going to do that and I think that's really what... the conference is"

(Adam, FLM)

The real significance of the annual conference, however, stems from its content. Research participants unanimously agreed that Optica's 'strategy' for the coming year is announced during this event. Hence, the yearly conference

triggers a yearly cycle. For FLMs, the conference is: “where it [strategy] starts” (Carol, FLM), when “[top managers] roll out the strategy for the year” (Madin, FLM) and make clear “what their vision is, where they want to be” (Sana, FLM). Therefore, this event triggers actions across the entire organisation. Unlike the abstract, printed strategy statement covering four years, “each year something new is added in, something else that they want you to do in store” (Adele, FLM). Once these annual directions announced, FLMs work in teams to come up with the best ways to realise these in their stores (Sana, FLM; Lahar, FLM). FLMs do not engage in creative thinking exercises regarding how they could shape the future of Optica. Indeed, they are only required to consider how the announced strategic directions are to be efficiently realised (Malek, FLM).

Second, FLMs meet their peers within the same region in the Monthly Regional Meetings (MRMs). These meetings are organised outside the stores (in a hired, hotel conference room) and headed by the RM. The core topics are set in advance by the OD, and cover three general areas:

- A review of the previous month’s performance in the region and the company;
- Operational details of upcoming events (such as changes to the payroll system); and
- Ad-hoc messages from top managers (announcing regions restructuring, new appointments).

FLMs discuss, debate, challenge and share their views and practices in relation to the content of the presentation. these debates were witnessed

numerous times during the observed SMMs. For example, the observation notes from one of the MRMs read:

'10:10 a.m. Katie (MM) starts with slides prepared by the Operations Director. A discussion starts about engaging optometrists with the rest of the team; the focus is on the need to change optometrists' 'mind-set'. The suggestion is to have an 'honest' chat with them, the importance of mentoring optometrists whilst they are in the pre-registration period.

10:33 a.m. Zain (FLM) discusses the relationship between the professional services department and the operations. Katie challenges some of the ideas in this viewpoint. The conversation moves from involving the optometrists in the shop floor into the role of professional services. The conversation then moves back to the optometrists, and the differences [in the cooperation of optometrists with the FLM] among different stores. There is an emergent idea to make them (optometrists) meet together, which was trialled in the past. Katie is explaining why it failed before, Laura (FLM) mentions the lack of funding. Zain (FLM) is distinguishing the advantages of a unified and strong 'central' message from HO as having a bigger impact on the optometrists.'

(MRM 4)

Here, a message was relayed through the presentation from the OD, in which he instructs FLMs to find ways to better involve the optometrists (professionals) with the rest of the team (non-professionals) within stores. The debate and discussions which followed lasted for 30 minutes, agreeing in principle with the point raised. FLMs, however, believed that one department at the HO (professional services) is unsupportive, and that this particular department sends inconsistent messages about how much 'power' professionals should have in stores. As such, FLMs moved the discussion from an operational

issue (micro-managing optometrists in their stores) to a strategic issue (the role of HO in the day-to-day work). The discussion then re-focused on finding appropriate practices to respond to the point raised by the OD. Here, FLMs referred to previous experiences, raised some challenges and suggested new practices.

Third, the yearly conference and the MRM are both scheduled interactions in which strategy and related operational issues are discussed. In addition, the CEO and the OD carry out random, unannounced visits to the stores. During these visits, the top manager spends some time on the shop floor, observing the day-to-day work and discussing any concerns directly with the FLM and other staff members: “[the CEO and the OD] are not there just to talk to the store managers, they will talk to absolutely everybody” (Katie, MM).

These in-person interactions are important because FLMs and other staff members in the peripheries were able to engage with the CEO personally and with the strategic directions/vision they set:

“I think in those years 2003 to 2005 or '06, think it was quite good years 'cause... Ben (CEO) came out a lot, you did see him a lot, he did speak to people and you could challenge him or something. But the man is [a] genius on his own so, he could break everything down further for you.”

(Hiba, FLM)

FLMs were engaged with the organisation's strategy when they interacted with the top managers. Kedar recalled and compared two previous CEOs:

“nobody really knew Barry; never saw him, I mean, I can't remember who we had before actually. When going back, the last CEO I remember was Ben, personally. I mean, he is the one who made the

biggest impression, when he came in the store, he was very dynamic, you know. He, he did not know you but he came in with, like, a passion and you believed in that."

(Kedar, FLM)

Store visits also help to create a direct line of communication, although for a short time, between the top managers and the shop floor. Indy thought that seeing the CEO in person is important for him and his staff:

"in the past where we just had one message come from the exec, and it's been relayed through perhaps say an email to the regionals, and then the regionals sent that message in the managers meeting... Some people are going to pick it up and some people aren't. I think the way that they're coming out to the regional meetings is much more beneficial... because one, you get to see them on what they're thinking, and obviously their views on what you were saying... It's not an email, he's personally been into a store and seen it himself and you can relate to it."

(Indy, FLM)

Moreover, FLMs believed they have a vital role in selecting relevant information from these meetings and conveying them to their teams. This is part of the localising work FLMs carry out. For example, Kiran (FLM) saw the yearly conference as the place in which he obtains the strategic direction. His participation at the conference is important because he is the connection point between Optica and his employees, and it is a vital part of his job to communicate these yearly strategic directions with his team: "it's [strategy] fed to the store managers and the store managers will then, um, come back to their store teams, do a conference debrief to... to the team" (Kiran, FLM). Similarly, Adam believed that strategy is communicated mainly through the monthly MRM, and it is his duty to communicate that to his team:

"[the strategy] comes from our monthly meeting, which is the store managers' meetings which is then, the information taken from the regional managers and regional operations review on a monthly basis and those messages are then conveyed to me. I would then come away from that meeting and convey that back into the team as best as I can; obviously, taking the relevant information."

(Adam, FLM)

Interactive communication channels, then, are used to communicate and discuss Optica's strategy to and with the FLMs. These channels are loaded with social interactions and allow FLMs to discuss the organisation's strategy with their superiors and peers.

5.5.3 Summary

The last theoretical construct (FLMs in the flow of position-practices) covers data that situates the agents-in-focus (the FLMs) within immediate social relations. Four types of social actors (RMs, fellow FLMs, subordinates and workers in HO departments) appear in the immediate context of FLMs. RMs are quite busy, leaving the FLMs to deal with and manage the day-to-day work. FLMs build a social network with fellow FLMs to support each other and share information. Competent subordinates free FLMs' time to focus on developing the business in the stores. Additionally, there is a strong tension between the HO (the centre) and the stores (the peripheries). This tension is born out of unifying/localising efforts by the two sides and is magnified by the geographical distance between the two.

Lastly, two types of communication channels appear in the data. Non-interactive communication channels (emails, memos and a weekly newsletter) transfer operational details. Optica's strategy is however communicated through

interactive communications (annual conference, MRMs and store visits by top managers), where social actors discuss these important issues.

5.6 Chapter summary

During the analysis process, I moved iteratively and abductively between data and theory. As a result, the emergent themes were mapped against, and organised within, the main theoretical constructs in Strong Structuration Theory. This organisation facilitated unpacking the complex strategizing practices and praxis within their respective contexts. Presenting the data using theoretical construct from SST also sustained consistency across the present research, from theoretical stance to research methodology to interpretations. It equally helped synthesise a large amount of data collected from various sources and a number of actors. This internal consistency demonstrates academic rigors and coherence driving the present study and linking the different chapters.

Research participants discussed three main types of external structures when discussing the organisation's strategy, these were: strategy as a shared vision/mission, strategy as a brand image and a market share, and strategy as targets and KPIs. These external structures are imposed upon and shared among FLMs, and guide the labour of FLMs toward attaining common goals for the entire organisation. FLMs cited the changes in the Chief Executive Officer position as important and relevant events to set out these external structures. A chronological narrative of the different CEOs in the past 13 years illustrates these historical forces and how these changed affected shop floor work.

Worldviews and general beliefs are reflected in the FLMs' general-disposition (internal) structures. These general-dispositions made some FLMs

perceive their role to be unstrategic and limited to practices that helps the organisation attain its common goals. Furthermore, FLMs' professional experience in Optica and the industry reflects conjuncturally-specific internal structures. Experience gained by working in different locations accumulates in the form of tacit knowledge, empowering FLMs to realise the importance of their local work in relation to realising the organisation's strategy. This accumulated tacit knowledge summarises tested-and-worked practices; the areas to prioritise in the day-to-day work; and what is considered legitimate.

FLMs carry out numerous mundane tasks necessary for running the store. FLMs' work on the shop floor broadly seeks to manage two areas, these are people (both employees and customers) and results (in terms of store's commercial performance). The majority of FLMs believed that supporting and developing their staff, and providing their customers with the best possible levels of service, is the best way to obtain better results.

FLMs perceive their influence over organisational-level strategy-formulation to be non-existent, and this could be due to a lack of seeing the results of their feedback. Nonetheless, FLMs have an important job in *realising* Optica's strategy, rather than formulating it. Realisation seems to be achieved through a process of *localising*, whereby FLMs adopt and adapt appropriate praxis and practices. This appropriation takes into account internal and external factors, echoing the two broad areas (people and results) they manage in their day-to-day work.

FLMs' conduct is placed within the relevant historical and social forces. Hence, the relation between FLMs and main types of social actors in their immediate context (RMs, subordinates, peers and HO departments) reveals the

influence each of these has on localising practices and praxis. Lastly, strategic issues are communicated through interactive channels, while non-interactive channels are used to communicate operational non-strategic matters.

In the subsequent chapter, these findings are interpreted in the light of current literature. By doing so, the research questions are answered and the contributions claimed by the present case study are established.

Chapter Six - Discussion

6.1 *Overview of the chapter*

The purpose of this chapter is to offer interpretations of the findings presented in the previous chapter and discuss these in relation to the current literature. A range of Strategy as Practice (SaP) research relied on structurationism to understand strategizing. This has allowed SaP scholars to analyse the recursive patterns of conduct routinely involved in strategizing (Jarzabkowski, 2008). It also enabled scholars to see practices and praxis, ontologically, as mutually constitutive of each other (Whittington, 2006). Further, it empowered the researcher to explore the interplay and the interrelationship between structure and agency (Whittington, 2010). The present research answers the research questions drawing on SST (Stones, 2005) to analyse the ongoing reciprocal interrelationship between the structural context and FLMs' strategic agency at the individual level in the course of strategizing.

The chapter proceeds in five main sections. The first section advances strategizing as a strategy-realising praxis in Optica. The data reveals two types of strategizing praxes. The first is a triggering praxis conducted by top managers, particularly the CEO, during the annual conference. This praxis affords the CEO to communicate with the peripheries how she/he (the CEO) intends to realise the abstract strategy statement. Triggering launches the strategy-realising process and sets the parameters for the subsequent FLMs' practices. The second type of strategizing praxis is localising. FLMs realise the intended strategy via appropriating the uniform organisation practices to their local settings. This part explicates how FLMs strategize in a store-based multi-unit organisation.

The second section discusses how the structural context includes enabling and construing conditions that affect FLMs' localising praxis. Strategy appears as a combination of external *and* general-dispositional internal structures. This conceptualisation explicates how different organisational actors assign different meanings to ostensibly the same organisation's strategy. Moreover, FLMs' previous experience accumulates in conjuncturally-specific internal structures. These structures represent tacit knowledge, which enables FLMs' localising praxis. This second section of the chapter discusses the structural context as both enables and constrains of FLMs strategizing praxis.

The third section conceives localising, the FLMs' strategy-realising praxis, as a process of structuration. This process facilitates integrating the content of the previous two sections in a general model of localising (Figure 6-1, p.252). FLMs draw on enabling and constraining structural conditions when enacting their strategic agency in overlapping, recurrent cycles. By doing so, FLMs reproduce and/or elaborate these structural conditions. Seeing localising praxis as a structuration process exhibits the duality of an organisational strategy. It also provides the means to expose how strategy is enacted in the day-to-day strategizing work of FLMs. This third section answers demonstrated how FLMs enact the organisational level strategy in their day-to-day work. These three sections allow the present study to theorise how structure and agency co-depend and co-construct in the strategizing process as recursive cycles of structuration.

The fourth section is a reflection on operationalizing SST as a theoretical framework for conducting SaP research. The present study validates SST as a useful and comprehensive theory to undertake empirical strategizing research. Several concepts and frameworks in SST provide promising opportunities for

SaP scholars. Nonetheless, some shortcomings arose in the course of the present study. These shortcomings are brought to the fore in this fourth section, and further developments to SST are proposed. In the course of the present research, one of these shortcomings was overcome by developing the four-dimension analysis model (Figure 4-2, p.141),

The fifth section synthesises the main contributions claimed by the present research. This section is organised around the themes that structured the literature review chapter. The present research advances a fresh way to understand an organisation's strategy as a structural context. It also extends the SaP research agenda in exploring the strategy-realising praxis of FLMS and further, it explains when and how strategy is enacted in the day-to-day strategizing work of FLMS, thus illuminating the interrelation between structure and agency in the course of strategizing at the individual level.

6.2 *Different strategizing praxes at different levels*

SaP scholars insist on placing the strategizing practices and praxis within the specific context in which they occur (Balogun et al., 2003; Pettigrew, 1997). Consequently, the SaP literature offers different definitions of strategizing (see Table 2-1, p.47). This variation, it was concluded in 2.4.1 (p.43), is attributed to two main factors. First, SaP is an umbrella construct (Floyd et al., 2011) that encourages diversity by welcoming efforts to bridge strategy with sociology, and organisation and management studies. Hence, a diversity of perspectives on the strategizing phenomenon is applauded. Second, there is no consensus on what defines a social practice neither within the strategic management literature (Carter et al., 2008b), nor within the wider social sciences field (Schatzki, 2001). This led me to argue that empirical SaP papers offer context-led strategizing

definitions (2.4.1, p.43). What constitutes strategizing work in a particular study is dependent upon the research settings, the research questions and the unit of analysis (cf. Balogun et al., 2003). In the present research, strategizing is defined as *a strategy-realising process that transposes the abstract strategy statement into the concrete conduct of managers*. This definition deserves an elaboration.

An organisation's strategy is usually expressed in abstract terms, communicated to, and shared amongst, its employees and shareholders (Mantere, 2008; Steensen, 2014). Optica has a four-year strategy statement that represents the abstract expression of its strategy. FLMs referred to the content of this strategy statement as they discussed strategic targets (Kedar, FLM; Adele, FLM) and the core mission of Optica (internal emails and memos; Yeva, FLM). CEOs and other actors draw on this statement when outlining and explaining how its content can be achieved. Since the statement is broad in nature, managers need to decide and plan how it can be realised. Realising strategy requires managers to take concrete actions. Strategy-realising, then, is a process that aims to connect the abstract statement to concrete actions.

Strategy-realising work is not an equivalent to strategy implementation. Strategy implementation assumes that top and middle managers set clear, minute operational instructions for FLMs to execute. Authors who belong to the traditional strategic management camp list 'success factors' of strategy implementation to minimise, and possibly eliminate, the discrepancy between the intended and the realised strategic outcomes (Bryson and Bromiley, 1993; Okumus, 2003; Yip, 1992). Strategy-realising work outspreads beyond the functional and the instrumental notion of strategy implementation (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992; Noble, 1999) by acknowledging and accounting for the

creative agency of front-line managers, hence the possibility to do otherwise (Giddens, 1984), permitted by their horizon for actions (Stones, 2005), as they go about their day-to-day work.

As with many earlier definitions of strategizing, the proposed definition highlights the social and processual nature of strategizing (Denis et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski, 2008). It also emphasises the day-to-day managerial work and its strategic outcomes, a recurrent theme in the definitions offered by SaP scholars (Johnson et al., 2003; Maitlis and Lawrence, 2003). Strategy-realising also alludes to the mobilisation of strategic agency. However, the suggested definition is distinctive because, unlike previous definitions, it explicitly privileges strategy-realising practices and praxis in contrast to strategy-formulation ones (cf. Balogun et al., 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2008). Strategizing, in the context of this research, is concerned with *how* social actors consume the abstract (Abdallah and Langley, 2014) and constitute the concrete within their organisational context.

6.2.1 Strategizing differences between the centre/top and the peripheries

The present research unearths two dominant strategy-realising praxes in Optica. These two praxes emerge at two levels: the centre/top (triggering) and the peripheries (localising). Earlier SaP studies illustrate that different strategizing practices and praxes co-exist within the same organisation (Burgelman, 1983; Floyd and Lane, 2000; Jarzabkowski, 2008; Regnér, 2003; Stensaker and Falkenberg, 2007). Most related to the present study, both Regnér (2003) and Stensaker and Falkenberg (2007) distinguish different types of strategy-formulating practices according to whether the practices are taking place in the centre/top or at the periphery of an organisation. Further, and within the wider

strategic management literature, both Burgelman (1983) and Floyd and Lane (2000) assigned distinctive strategy-formulating or strategy-implementing roles to managers according to their hierarchical level within organisations (Appendix C, p.285). The present study expands this literature, elaborating two different strategy-realising praxes in Optica. First, at the centre/top of the organisation, CEOs and other top managers trigger the strategy-realising process. Second, FLMs in the peripheries engage in realising the strategic directions through localisation praxis.

6.2.1.1 Triggering

In Optica, top managers conduct business analysis and make strategic decisions about future business directions based on this analysis (Laura, FLM; Lea, FLM). FLMs are uninformed about the analysing practices that take place beforehand (Sana, FLM), at the centre/top. However, Optica's CEO announces and elaborates the intended strategic directions for the coming year(s) during the annual conference. Hence, this annual event is a milestone in the organisational life of Optica, concluding the analysis and the decision-making phases that precede it. Optica's annual conference marks the start of the realisation process (Kiran, FLM; Malek, FLM). For instance, Barry (CEO) announced in 2010 that to be the "Best Optician" in the market (part of the strategy statement), Optica has to focus on increasing its EBIT (Earnings Before Income Tax). For this to happen, stores must control their costs, reducing them to a set level of the store's sales total. The reduction of costs should be achieved, he added, by focusing on reducing labour costs and centralising some operations. In this example, Barry (CEO) announced how he believed Optica should achieve linking the abstract to the concrete by using a uniform set of practices.

Strategic management scholars assert frequently how top managers play an indispensable role in setting the strategic directions for their organisations (Burgelman, 1983; Clarke et al., 2012; Nag et al., 2007; Pettigrew, 1992). SaP research further scrutinised how top managers' interactions formulate organisation-level strategy during strategy setting episodes, such as strategy away-days and strategy meetings (Angwin et al., 2009; Beech and Johnson, 2005; Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2003). The present research maintains that top managers have a significant impact on setting and communicating the intended strategic directions of an organisation (see 5.2.4, p.168). However, the findings contribute to this body of work by going beyond strategy-formulation. Top managers have an equally important role in the realisation of an organisation's strategy. They trigger the realisation process starting the process of strategy-realisation for the subsequent year (see 6.4.1, p.250), and set constraining conditions to guide the conduct of FLMs (detailed in 6.3.1, p.237).

SaP scholars have examined the role of strategy away-days and episodes in strategy-formulation. Indeed, SaP empirical studies investigate how discourse and interactions result in formulating new strategic directions (Bourque and Johnson, 2008; Hendry and Seidl, 2003; Hodgkinson et al., 2006; Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2008). The present study stands in contrast to this body of research by illustrating how strategy away-days have an indispensable role in strategy-realisation, rather than strategy formulating. During the annual conference in Optica, FLMs are invited to brainstorm and provide innovative ideas to optimise the realisation of the announced strategic directions (Sana, FLM), rather than setting new organisational strategic directions.

6.2.1.2 Localising

At the peripheries (in the stores), a different type of strategizing praxis and practices emerges from the data. FLMs at Optica believe that they do not participate in formulating strategic directions (Carol, FLM). As such, they are not strategy champions (Mantere, 2005, p.157) who attempt to influence organisational-wide issues larger than their immediate responsibilities. FLMs, however, are active actors in realising the predefined strategic directions (Roy, MM). This is to be expected, the research participants asserted, since FLMs are the ones who drive the business on the shop floor and face customers (Laura, FLM; Indy, MM).

In Optica, as with many other multi-unit organisations, there exist uniform organisational practices (Raji, FLM; Zain; FLM). These uniform practices are broadly influenced by the overall organisation's strategy, and favour improving the performance of the entire organisation in aggregate rather than maximising the performance of any individual store (Zain, FLM; Hiba, FLM). Localising reflects the day-to-day work conducted by FLMs in order to adapt and customise uniform organisational practices to the local setting of the individual store. It entails tweaking, challenging or elaborating (Jack, FLM; Hiba, FLM) Optica's uniform practices. Hence, FLMs, as strategy-realising actors, are continuously engaged in localising praxis.

In their paper, Stensaker and Falkenberg (2007) argue that the (middle) managers' interpretations of a given strategic change develops overtime and leads to a customisation response, where business unit managers introduce changes according to their business unit yet preserve the perceived organisational aim of the strategic change. The localising-work described above

echoes Stensaker and Falkenberg's (2007) argument, extending it from a business-unit level to the front-line management level. Additionally, localising-work detailed in the present research (see also 5.4.2, p.188) supports earlier findings by Burgelman (1983) and Mirabeau and Maguire (2014), that operational managers could contribute to the emergent strategy of the firm through enacting adaptive behaviours in their managerial work.

SaP scholars argue that strategizing praxis is constituted of multiple micro practices (Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007; Whittington, 2006). In the present case, the data revealed micro day-to-day practices through which FLMs achieve localisation (5.4.3.1, p.195; and 5.4.3.2, p.196). These micro practices are intertwined in the day-to-day work of FLMS (5.4.1, p. 184) and take both internal (size and demographics of the store employees) and external (competition, location and the local clientele) factors into consideration. Furthermore, FLMs actively scan incoming communications (interactive or non-interactive) and filter out what they consider to be irrelevant to their store, before transferring the message to their staff (Jack, FLM; Malek, FLM).

Micro localising practices are a necessary and an essential part of the FLM's job (Roy, MM; Hiba, FLM). This stands in contrast to results from previous research, and extends others. First, Stensaker and Falkenberg (2007) stipulate that customising the central strategic directions at the business unit level is driven by ambiguity in the former. Findings from this study, on the other hand, illustrate how strategizing in the peripheries forms part of the day-to-day work, and is not only a response to special conditions, such as ambiguity. Second, Regnér (2003) describes the inductive strategy-formulation at the business unit level as "externally oriented toward industry consultant, competitors, customers etc..."

(p.67). However, he (Regnér, 2003) does not discuss what motivates these practices. Findings from this study extend Regnér's (2003) work in showing strategizing as an ordinary part of the FLMs' job, and an integral part of their day-to-day work.

At the periphery, FLMs carry out localising practices to realise the intended strategic directions (announced by top managers). FLMs believe that they are unable to participate in the strategy-formulation process at Optica, or to introduce any organisation-wide change (see 5.4.2, p.188). SST offers a framework to explain this inability. Stones (2005) lists conditions under which agents are able to change the external structures (4.6.2, p.129). FLMs do not meet these conditions and hence are unable to alter the strategic directions of Optica. In particular, FLMs:

- do not possess adequate power due to their position in the organisational hierarchy (Lea, FLM);
- do not have adequate knowledge about the overall (national) market (Hiba, FLM); and
- are situated too close to the operations, preventing them from having an adequate distance from the day-to-day work on the shop floor to be able to critically see the big picture (Laura, FLM).

CEOs and other top managers, conversely, operate within supporting conditions (they have adequate power, knowledge and the critical distance) enabling them to set and change organisation-level strategy. This explanation provides novel insights into why FLMs are unable to participate directly in the strategy-formulation process.

6.2.2 Connecting the two praxes

The two strategy-realising praxes discussed above (triggering and localising) are enacted by different actors and take place at different hierarchical levels within the organisation. However, they are not isolated from each other. The data reveal that: 1) triggering sets the structural parameters for localising, 2) there is a time/space delay between the two, and 3) intra-organisation communication plays a vital part in connecting the two praxes.

First, FLMs do not have an absolute freedom to change uniform practices when localising (Sajan, FLM). Localising is limited by a set of conditions, which are established by top managers in the triggering praxis. This constraining represents organisational forces that reduce FLMs' ability to localise and minimise their input in the strategy-realising process. The ability to localise is essential to maximise the performance of the stores (peripheries) in Optica (Adele, FLM; Sonia, MM). Achieving a superior performance is driven, FLMs argued, through the ability of FLMs to deploy any necessary means to realise Optica's strategic directions, the latter being drawn up by the centre/top (Sajan, FLM). Therefore, the ability to localise was described by FLMs as setting another strategy at the store level (see 5.3.2, p.174). This store-level strategy is derived from the organisation-level strategy (Sajan, FLM, Sati, FLM). Localising, however, is a source for a centre-peripheries tension (Laura, FLM; Isaac, MM). Giving 320 FLMs (the number of outlets in Optica) the liberty to change uniform practices means that the organisation, as a whole, loses the consistency that is essential for its long-term success (Sati, FLM, Roy, MM). While the centre/top seeks uniformity, FLMs localisation seeks adaptation and divergence.

Second, there is a delay in time and space between the triggering and the localising praxes discussed earlier. The findings evidence a delay in the start of the two strategizing praxes whereby the triggering praxis takes place at the annual conference, before FLMs return and start the localising process in their stores (Malek, FLM; Kedar, FLM). It is reasonable to say that this issue is not unique to the case study, and presents itself in other organisations. Optica, however, is spread over a large geographical area making this temporal/spatial distance more pronounced.

Third, internal organisational communications play an important part in connecting the two strategizing praxes (triggering and realising). Two types of communication channels were identified in the data: interactive and non-interactive. The findings indicate that interactive channels (annual meeting, store visits) have a primary role in strategy-realisation. Indeed, research participants confirmed that having an abstract strategy statement on paper is, on its own, futile (Adele, FLM; Adam, FLM). The social qualities of the CEO, usually revealed during social and inter-personal interactions, are what give life to that strategy statement (Madin, FLM; Roy, MM). Therefore, when the organisation's strategy is discussed in face-to-face interactions, FLMs and employees in the peripheries become mindful of the organisation's strategy and far more engaged in realising it (Sati, FLM; Katie, MM). FLMs reported their disengagement with the organisation's strategy when top managers did not conduct store visits (Madin, FLM). Current strategic management literature highlights the importance of communicating strategy across the organisation (Aaltonen and Ikävalko, 2002; Floyd and Lane, 2000), and the present case study goes beyond this importance,

drawing attention to the type of communication since interactive communications are more valued by FLMs in Optica when it comes to strategy-realisation.

6.2.3 Summary and a discussion

The present empirical study defines strategizing as a social praxis that connects the abstract statement to the concrete conduct in a strategy-realising process. The data exposes two strategy-realising (strategizing) praxes: triggering and localising. Top managers conduct strategy-realising triggering praxis, announcing their intentions in a face-to-face interaction. This triggering sets the cycle of strategy-realising in motion, and provides FLMs with the top managers' vision on how to realise the abstract strategy statement. Through triggering, top managers also set the parameters within which FLMs enact their strategic agency. In the peripheries (stores), FLMs enact their strategic agency through adapting organisation-wide, uniform practices to their local environment, what is labelled localising work in this thesis. Localising is part of the day-to-day work of FLMs (this is revisited in 6.4.2, p.255) and has an important effect on the performance of the organisation. Inter-organisational communication connects these two praxes, and the medium of the communication, hence whether interactive or not, influences the success of the strategy-realising process.

Theoretical definitions of strategizing invite researchers to look beyond strategy-formulation towards strategy enactment (Fenton and Jarzabkowski, 2006; Johnson et al., 2003; Whittington, 1996). Yet, empirical strategizing research has zoomed in on strategizing praxis and practices that are mainly concerned with strategy-formulation (Balogun et al., 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Maitlis and Lawrence, 2003; Mantere, 2008). An attentiveness to the day-to-day work lays at the heart of practice philosophy and is interested in what people

actually do (Barley and Kunda, 2001; Carroll et al., 2008; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Zundel and Kokkalis, 2010); the strategy-realising notion materialises in tandem with that. Strategy-realising strategizing encompasses the creative work of social actors (Giddens, 1984; Stones, 2005) as they connect the abstract to the concrete in their day-to-day work, a central concern for SaP scholarship (Chia and MacKay, 2007; Mantere, 2008; Whittington, 2006). The present research opens up the SaP agenda to this fresh avenue on strategizing work.

Previous research revealed multiple strategizing practices and praxis at different levels within organisations. Strategic management scholars, including SaP enthusiasts, asserted the difference between strategizing practices at the centre/top of the organisation and those practices at the periphery (Burgelman, 1983; Floyd and Lane, 2000; Regnér, 2003; Stensaker and Falkenberg, 2007). The present study affirms these assertions, revealing different strategizing praxes at different levels in Optica. Furthermore, most of these previous studies assigned strategy-formulating roles to top managers (Burgelman, 1983; Floyd and Lane, 2000). In addition to their traditional role in setting the strategic directions for an organisation, this present research highlights the role of top managers in triggering the strategy-realisation process.

SaP scholars shed light on Middle Managers' (MMs) strategizing activities and practices, enriching the strategic management literature and expanding the pool of strategists in organisations (Balogun et al., 2003; Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Floyd and Lane, 2000; Mantere, 2005; Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011; Suominen and Mantere, 2010). This present research reveals strategizing praxes and practices at the FLM level ostensibly similar to those unearthed by SaP scholars at the MMs' level. For instance, the present research

echoes Mantere's (2008) argument that MMs' strategizing is constrained by conditions set by top managers, Stensaker and Falkenberg's (2007) description of how MMs customise strategic change initiatives to their business unit and Suominen and Mantere's (2010) discussion of instrumental tactics of strategy consumption as MMs appropriate organisational discourse to attain an intended outcome. Although ostensibly similar, the day-to-day strategizing practices revealed in the present study are concerned with FLMs and strategy-realisation, rather than MMs and strategy-formulation as in previous studies.

Several studies in the strategic management literature share common assumptions about the role of FLMs, excluding these managers, explicitly or implicitly, from strategy-formulating activities (Burgelman, 1983; Clarke et al., 2012; Floyd and Lane, 2000; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Nag et al., 2007). Relying on insights from SST (Stones, 2005) the present study contributes to the strategic management literature by explaining why these front-line managers might be unable to participate in strategy-formulation. More specifically, knowledgeable managers must have the power, the critical distance and the necessary information if they are to participate in strategy-formulation or to influence the entire organisation. Potentially, this could also be transposed into conditions to include FLMs in strategy-formulating activities. While too early to make a solid case, this inclusion could contribute to an emerging movement within the SaP field, labelled open strategizing (a sub-theme around the topic was scheduled in the European Group for Organisation Studies conference in 2015).

6.3 *Structural context as enabling and constraining conditions*

SaP literature brought to the fore how social practices can have constraining or enabling effects on strategizing (Cabantous et al., 2010; Jarzabkowski, 2003; Mantere, 2005). The present study highlights structural conditions that act as constraining and enabling conditions on FLMs' strategy-realising praxis (localisation). First, the concept 'organisation's strategy' constrains FLMs' localising praxis, guiding their conduct towards uniformity. Optica's strategy manifests itself in the data as a set of external and general-dispositional (internal) structures. Second, professional experience, as a set of conjuncture-specific internal structures, enables FLMs' localising work. This experience reflects FLMs' knowledge of their professional context and the tacit knowledge they accumulate. Further, FLMs enact their strategic agency drawing on and reproducing these enabling and constraining structural conditions in their context. In other words, FLMs draw on, elaborate and reproduce both the organisation's strategy *and* their professional experience in their localising praxis.

6.3.1 Organisation's strategy as a set of constraining conditions

6.3.1.1 Organisation's strategy as a set of external structures and general-dispositional (internal) structures

Research participants articulated the concept 'strategy' in ways related to both internal and external social structures. External structures are understood to be pressing structural conditions, shared by actors-in-context and are not specific to an actor's interpretations or prejudices. Internal structures, on the other hand, are seen as sets of individual structural conditions that are particular to an individual actor, reflecting her/his worldviews and knowledge of her/his structural context. Some of these internal structures reflect the FLM's worldview and

cultural schemata, what Stones (2005) labels as 'general-dispositional structures' (a theoretical discussion of both types was offered in 4.6.2, p.129).

Findings from the present research conveyed three external structures when research participants discussed strategizing, these were: seeing strategy as a shared mission/vision, as a brand and a market share and as targets and KPIs (5.2, p.164). Similarly, research participants referred to three general-dispositional (internal) structures when discussing the term 'organisation's strategy' which are: linking strategy to the person in charge, linking strategy to the hierarchal position, and the participant's opinion about the importance of strategy (5.3, p172). When asked 'what is strategy' and 'what is Optica's strategy' (Table 4-3, p.113) research participants discussed a combination of general-dispositional (internal) and external structures. For instance, Sajan (FLM) reported strategy as something that gives a consistent direction across the whole company therefore external structures in the form of a shared vision/mission. Equally, Sajan (FLM) believed that the organisation's strategy is the work and responsibility of the CEO or general-dispositional structures in form of worldviews. Sajan (FLM), in this example, articulated the concept 'organisation's strategy' discussing a set of both types of structures (internal and external).

The variation of the general-dispositional (internal) structures among research participants explains why there is no agreement amongst research participants on what is Optica's strategy. For example, both Adele (FLM) and Sana (FLM) believed that providing excellent customer service (strategy as a shared vision/mission) is an essential aspect of Optica's strategy, hence both FLMs attached the same type of external structures to the concept of organisation's strategy. However, they discussed 'strategy' using different

general dispositional terms in their accounts. First, Sana (FLM) combined these external structures (providing excellent customer service) with her worldview that strategy depends on the manager's hierarchical level within the organisation (a general-dispositional internal structure). Hence, strategy at her level becomes concerned with providing the best possible levels of service, while top managers look at market share and profitability. Second, Adele (FLM) bundled the external structures (providing excellent customer service) with her belief that strategy comes from the individual who occupies the CEO position (a general-dispositional internal structure). At the time of the interview, a new CEO had just been recruited at Optica and very few people knew this person. As a result, Adele (FLM) said that Optica does not have a clear strategy, not because of the lack of an abstract statement, but because the new CEO (as an individual) was a stranger to her and her colleagues. In this example, the concept of the organisation's strategy was interpreted in different ways and consequently effected the localising praxis of these managers differently because each of the two FLMs held different general-dispositional beliefs about strategy.

The two aspects (two types of structures) of the concept organisation's strategy seem to be in tension under one condition, when the FLM dismisses the importance of strategy. In these cases, despite their beliefs, FLMs conduct their localising praxis within the pressing external conditions set by top managers as the organisation's strategy (see 6.3.1.1, p.237). Such tension was clear in Adam's (FLM) account for example, who believed that the organisation's strategy is unimportant, yet it is his job to make sure that every employee in his store, even part-time staff, knows and understands Optica's strategy.

The concept of strategy is a subject that is treated in multiple studies and reviews (Mantere, 2013; Mintzberg et al., 1998; Steensen, 2014; Whittington, 2001). The present case study contributes to this body of literature in its fresh way of conceptualising the concept of organisation's strategy. In particular, seeing an organisation's strategy as a set of general-dispositional (internal) *and* external structures explains the notion of strategy heterogeneity (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Steensen, 2014) at the individual level. Strategy heterogeneity conveys the existence of multiple notions of strategy (hence multiple strategies from the employees' and managers' perspectives) within the same settings. Strategy is something organisational, shared by and external to organisational members, as much as it is internal and personal to reflexive and knowledgeable actors.

6.3.1.2 External structures as constraining conditions

Findings from the present case study suggest that the two aspects of 'strategy' discussed above (external structures and general-dispositional (internal) structures) act as constraining conditions on strategy-realising praxis in the peripheries (retail outlets).

The first structural aspect of 'strategy' appears, in the present case study, as external social structures. These structural conditions guide the conduct of FLMs and other organisational members to serve organisational-level objectives (Raji, FLM; Laura, FLM). The CEO at the centre/top decides on the best ways for Optica to accomplish the abstract strategy statement (Roy, MM), and sets organisation-wide conditions in line with his/her decision (Hiba, FLM; Jack, FLM). Revisiting the case of Barry, the CEO who joined Optica in 2008, helps illustrate this point.

Barry is reported to have believed that boosting the financial performance of Optica is the best way to attain the abstract strategy statement, such as being the best optician in the market and achieving 15% EBIT and so forth.

During the annual conference, Barry (CEO) announced his belief, alongside certain changes to help Optica accomplish this. In particular, Barry (CEO):

- Introduced a new sales bonus scheme rewarding only staff who sell top-end products (Abby, FLM);
- shrank the range of products and consequently customers' choices (Katie, MM); and
- reduced the number of on-site production laboratories, downplaying the importance of placing technical skills near the customer (Adele, FLM).

FLMs, consequently, had a narrower range of products and services to offer their local clientele; had to send any spectacles to a central lab losing the ability to serve customers quickly; and rewarded staff with the highest sales figures regardless of their ability to meet the client's needs. This example illustrates how Barry (CEO) established organisational external structures that privileged the financial performance of stores at the expense of reducing customer service levels (Isaac, MM). A minority of FLMs exhibited signs of resistance to the new structures (Katie, MM; Lea, FLM). The consequences of following these guiding conditions were strongly criticised and described as unsuccessful (Laura, FLM; Isaac, MM) despite the overall increase of Optica's revenue (industry report). External structures described above guide the practices of FLMs towards uniformity (Balogun, 2006; Chang and Harrington Jr., 2003; Garvin and Levesque, 2008) and have constraining properties (Mantere,

2005; Vaara and Whittington, 2012) on the FLMs' localising practices (Zain, FLM; Stacy, FLM; Katie, MM).

Strategic management scholars have long asserted the role of top management in setting organisation-level strategy. In traditional views (Mintzberg et al., 1998; Whittington, 2001) of strategic management, top managers have the hierarchal power to formulate strategic directions and impose their views on the organisation (Ansoff, 1965; Burgelman, 1983; Floyd and Lane, 2000). Once they formulate organisation-level strategy, traditional perspectives argue, top managers transform these into operational, detailed instructions for FLMs to follow and execute (cf. Mintzberg et al., 1998). In contrast to this traditional view, SaP scholars argue that top managers could be seen as an important, but not the sole, source of strategic directions in organisations (Angwin et al., 2009; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Mantere, 2005; Rouleau, 2005; Samra-Fredericks, 2005).

SaP research stipulates that top managers' ability to influence the organisation is done through dynamic, social processes, suggesting that the conventional command-and-control implementation process usually described in traditional literature is an over simplification (cf. Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006). For example, Jarzabkowski and Sillince (2007) illustrate how rhetorical practices of top managers can influence employees, and Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) argue that top managers should establish a dialogue around strategic change with their employees instead of handing down orders. The present study expands this literature, providing an alternative explanation on how top managers can guide their organisations in the intended strategic direction. Explicitly, the present study maintains top managers' ability to guide their organisations through establishing and maintaining pressing social conditions in

the form of organisational social structures, which are external structures to the FLMs and other employees.

6.3.1.3 General-dispositional (internal) structures as constraining conditions

FLMs reported the second structural aspect of 'strategy' as general-dispositional (internal) structures (see 5.3.1, p.173), derived from their worldviews, cultural schemata and belief systems (Rouleau, 2005; Stones, 2005; Whittington, 1992). The findings indicate that these general-dispositional structures constrain the localising praxis of FLMs.

First, FLMs considered that the horizon for their actions is reliant upon their hierarchal position in the organisation. FLMs sit at the bottom of the management hierarchy and as such have very little power (Lea, FLM). Hence, some FLMs believed their role is limited to reproducing organisation-level uniform practices in a replication process (Carol, FLM; Balan, FLM). These predispositions constrain FLMs' creative input when localising.

Equally, front-line and middle managers expressed their views on different CEOs. Each CEO was associated with a particular personal approach (Katie, MM; Madin, FLM; Roy, MM). FLMs deduced that this personal approach stems from the CEO's openness to discuss strategy and their closeness to the shop floor (Hiba, FLM; Sonia, MM). FLMs' inability to discuss strategy directly with the CEO was an important factor in limiting their localising work (Zain, FLM; Madin, FLM).

Lastly, all but two research participants believed that an organisation's strategy is important to guide FLMs and employees efforts towards attaining common, organisation-level strategic targets (Sana, FLM; Raji, FLM; Sonia, MM).

Without believing in the importance of strategy to achieve common goals, FLMS would conduct localising work that aims to maximise the store's performance (Raji; FLM), regardless of the impact of their localising practices on the rest of the organisation. FLMS' worldview that strategy is important led them to constrain their localising work in a way that serves the organisation's strategy.

The general-dispositional (internal) structures, like the ones discussed here, seldom appear in the SaP literature. One rare exception is Rouleau's (2005) work, where she illustrates how a general belief system (being a Francophone or an Anglophone middle manager in a Canadian context) influences the practices of middle managers. This present study contributes to our limited knowledge in this area through illustrating how worldviews and general beliefs have a constraining effect on the strategy-realising praxis of FLMS.

6.3.2 Professional experience as enabling conditions for localising praxis

Previous professional experience reflects the FLMS' knowledge of their specific context. FLMS' accumulated experience in the store-based retailing industry enabled their localising praxis. In particular, the length of experience *and* how it was gained have strong impacts on enabling FLMS localising-work.

First, longer experience helps FLMS build confidence, recognising the significance of their localising-work in the strategy-realising process (Laura, FLM). FLMS with longer experience are also able to identify what can, and what cannot, be localised in a particular context (Sati, MM; Sonia, MM). Less experienced FLMS saw their role as executors of orders, rather than active participants in realising the organisation's strategy (Abby, FLM; KHLID, FLM).

Second, gaining experience by working in different locations (i.e. different stores or companies) is important to enable FLMs' localising. Lea (FLM) and Carol (FLM) for instance, had worked in the same store for many years and were not able to articulate their localising praxis in their day-to-day work clearly. This stands in contrast to, for example, Jack (FLM), who worked with Optica and other retail-based companies and appreciated the importance of localising the uniform practices to the local environment to the extent of declaring that 90% of information received in emails were not applicable to his store. Working in different stores is important in enabling localising because, among other things, it allows FLMs to experiment through trial and error (Sajan, FLM) as they deal with different teams (Sonia, MM), different mentors (Laura, FLM) and different commercial environments (Kedar, FLM).

Previous experience makes FLMs more skilful in localising (Katie, MM; Sonia, MM) through developing two types of tacit knowledge. First, FLMs were better predispositioned to justify and argue their case for localising through competently negotiating with their superiors. Kiran (FLM), for example, was able to negotiate not charging a particular fee, which was set by the top managers and applied across the whole company, after successfully arguing that his local environment prevents him from doing so (details in 5.4.4, p.199). Second, FLMs develop a tacit knowledge in the form of 'worked methods of operating' they resort to in their localising praxis. As retail store managers, they know that their ultimate goal is to achieve growth and deliver financial results (Raji, FLM), and their day-to-day work strikes a balance between managing people and results (5.4.1, p.184).

Within the SaP literature, studies that deal directly with the role of managers' tacit knowledge in their strategizing praxis are a rarity. One of these exceptions is Rouleau's (2005) empirical study that examined how middle managers deploy their tacit professional knowledge to sell strategic change to external stakeholders. Another is Miller et al.'s (2004) study, linking previous managerial experience in similar conditions to better planning for implementation. In a theoretical paper, Chia and Holt (2006) argue the experience of skilful managers enables them to 'find their way' as they cope with constantly emerging conditions- what the authors call persuasive practical coping (p. 648). Furthermore, the SaP literature is mute about how this tacit knowledge comes about. The present case study contributes to the SaP literature suggesting two contributing factors: the length of the professional experience and how such experience was gained. Reflexive and knowledgeable managers (Giddens, 1984; Jarzabkowski, 2008; Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007) in Optica accumulate their experience and knowledge of their context as conjuncturally-specific (internal) structures. These structures enable them to grasp the importance, the potential impact, and the mechanism of localising as their strategizing praxis.

6.3.3 Summary and a discussion

In Optica, structural conditions constrain and enable strategy-realising praxis at the FLM level (localising). The organisation's strategy constrains localising, while previous professional experience enables it. FLMs discussed the term 'organisation's strategy' referring to a combination of external structures (pressing conditions) and general-dispositional internal structures (schemata and worldviews). Strategy in Optica constrains the strategy-realising praxis of FLMs, and guides their work, in a way that prioritises uniformity over local adaptation.

This constraining aims to maximise the performance of the entire organisation rather than the performance of any individual store. Moreover, FLMs build tacit, contextualised knowledge through previous working experience. This tacit knowledge enables localising work. Two factors seem important to build this enabling professional experience, these are: working in different environments and the length of the working experience.

The present case study illustrates how the concept of strategy, as both internal general-dispositions and external structures, constrains the strategizing praxis of FLMs. This is different from previous research on strategizing that looked at how strategizing practices enable or constrain the actions of strategic actors (Vaara and Whittington, 2012, pp.293-294). For example, Mantere's study looks at how the recursiveness and adaptive nature of strategic practices enable or disable strategic championing of middle managers (Mantere, 2005), Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008) further demonstrate how micro practices within meetings influence strategic decisions whilst Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2003, p.46) illustrate how a top management team in one university used strategic planning practices to shift power towards the centre, thereby enabling a centrally controlled strategizing process, and Heracleous and Jacobs (2008) discuss how embodied metaphors enable creativity in strategizing. This study, conversely, elaborates on how structural contexts constrain and enable the strategizing (strategy-realising) praxes of managers, contributing to an evolving literature that invites studies of the role of social structures in strategizing (Herepath, 2014; Suddaby et al., 2013). SaP opened the strategic management agenda into new possibilities, humanising strategic management research. However, it has received considerable critique for being too obsessed with the individual (Carter

et al., 2008a; Rouleau, 2013; Seidl and Whittington, 2014). Human agency is a cornerstone in strategizing, but structural context still matters as the present study demonstrates. Hence, a balanced approach that accounts for both structural context and strategic agency is encouraged.

Conceptualising an organisation's strategy as a combination of external and internal social structures advances our knowledge on multiple fronts. First, it permits scholars to account for strategy heterogeneity (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Steensen, 2014) where multiple notions of strategy co-exist within the same context. Second, it does away with dichotomies in strategic management research (Pozzebon, 2004; Whittington, 1988). Strategy, in this view, is a duality (Farjoun, 2010; Giddens, 1984; Whittington, 1992): neither organisational nor personal, but both together. It is a social construct that accommodates relative degrees of variation (Stones, 2005, p.80). Composed of social structures, strategy can be present in everyday life inside organisations, even in the most mundane tasks (more on this in 6.4.2, p.255). Third, an intriguing point is for strategy to have an internal, personal side. FLMS' worldviews, cultural schemata and belief systems are constantly and recursively altered, elaborated or challenged in the course of the strategizing praxis (more in 6.4.1, p.250). What a manager describes as 'organisation's strategy' today might be different to what they see as strategy in the future. Strategy, then, is not a constant, stable component in the social praxis but is a socially constructed concept that takes varying degrees of legitimacy and importance across time and space. Strategy enters the social praxis as a flexible, changeable variable, allowing social actors the possibility to modify the personal aspect, depending on their particular horizon

of action, while still sustaining the external aspect to achieve common organisational purposes.

Seeing strategy as a combination of external and internal structures does not contradict SaP's fundamental premise, which sees strategy as the doing of social actors (Balogun et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006). Social structures constituting the concept of 'organisation's strategy' are the outcomes of previous structuration cycles (see 6.4.1, p.250), during which active agency reproduces or establishes new structures in a structuration process (Sewell Jr., 1992; Stones, 2005). For instance, the triggering praxis at the centre/top level establishes the external structures that direct FLMs localising.

Finally, the present case study advocates that previous professional experience is important in enabling strategizing praxis. Specifically, longer experience and gaining varied experience in multiple locales enable FLMs' strategy-realising praxes. This could be useful in understanding some critical factors in building tacit contextual knowledge (Chia and MacKay, 2007; Rouleau, 2005). Further, understanding the importance of the conjuncturally-specific (internal) structure could help researchers understand how some managers (FLMs or other) gain legitimacy and/or power beyond what is prescribed to them by a position in the organisational hierarchy. Managers' experience counts because it provides them with the technical knowledge and/or political skills to shape or manoeuvre strategizing processes (Howard-Grenville, 2007; Kaplan, 2011; Oakes et al., 1998; Schoenberger, 1994). Such tacit knowledge could be the source of legitimacy and power in the course of social praxis.

6.4 *Strategy-realising praxis as a structuration process*

Localisation was identified in the present research as a strategy-realising praxis at the FLM level in Optica (6.2.1.2, p.229). Localisation involves continuous, ongoing, day-to-day strategizing work of managing internal (staff) and external (commercial environment) local factors. Understanding how strategy is enacted and embodied in this praxis offers a novel way to understand the involvement of the organisation's strategy in the day-to-day work of FLMs. In the current literature, structuration-like theories (Sminia, 2009) are employed to theorise the strategizing process as a social phenomenon (Jarzabkowski, 2008; Kaplan, 2008; Mantere, 2008). Such studies, as discussed in the literature review chapter, share two common features. First, they incorporate a structurationist ontology in combination with other theoretical lenses to overcome shortfalls in the Theory of Structuration (ToS). Second, they tend to be mainly concerned with the strategic agency of top and middle managers. Reviewing these studies illustrated that current literature remains mute about the interrelation between structure and agency at the individual level. The present study, by contrast, relies on Strong Structuration Theory (SST) to explicate how strategizing, as a structuration process, unfolds over time at the FLMs' level.

Drawing on SST's structuration cycle (Stones, 2005, p.85), localising is presented as a structuration process. This theorisation advocates strategizing as an ongoing process of multiple, recurrent, recursive and overlapping structuration cycles. Following this, a discussion of how strategy is enacted in the day-to-day work is offered.

6.4.1 Localising as a structuration process

Figure 6-1 below presents localising as a structuration process. It contains three rows. The top row reminds the reader of the theoretical concepts in Stones' (2005) structuration cycle. The middle row draws on the previous headings in this chapter, which established FLMs' strategizing as a strategy-realising praxis, constrained by the organisation's strategy and enabled by previous experiences. The third and last row draws on the themes presented in the Findings chapter (see Table 5-1, p.163) to list typical reflective questions posed (explicitly or implicitly) by knowledgeable FLMs (Giddens, 1979) in the localising praxis. The second part of Figure 6-1 place this 'cycle' within the wider context. Strategizing and localising is a recursive process composed of multiple recurring, overlapping cycles.

Two examples from the data breathe life to the model in Figure 6-1. Both examples were detailed in the Findings chapter (5.4.4, p.199), where I explicitly linked these examples to the theoretical elements of the figure below. To avoid repetition, the reader is encouraged to re-visit these examples. These two examples demonstrate successful and unsuccessful localising episodes as a structuration process. In the first, Kiran (FLM) was able to localise the uniform practice to suit his store. In the second, Stacy (FLM) failed to localise and continued conducting the uniform practice. While one could speculate about the reasons behind the success and the failure, the main concern in the present study is the process through which FLMs draw on structural context (external and internal, constraining enabling) in their strategy-realising praxis (localising). FLMs' localising, then, could be seen as a structuration process.

Figure 6-1 Localising as a structuration process

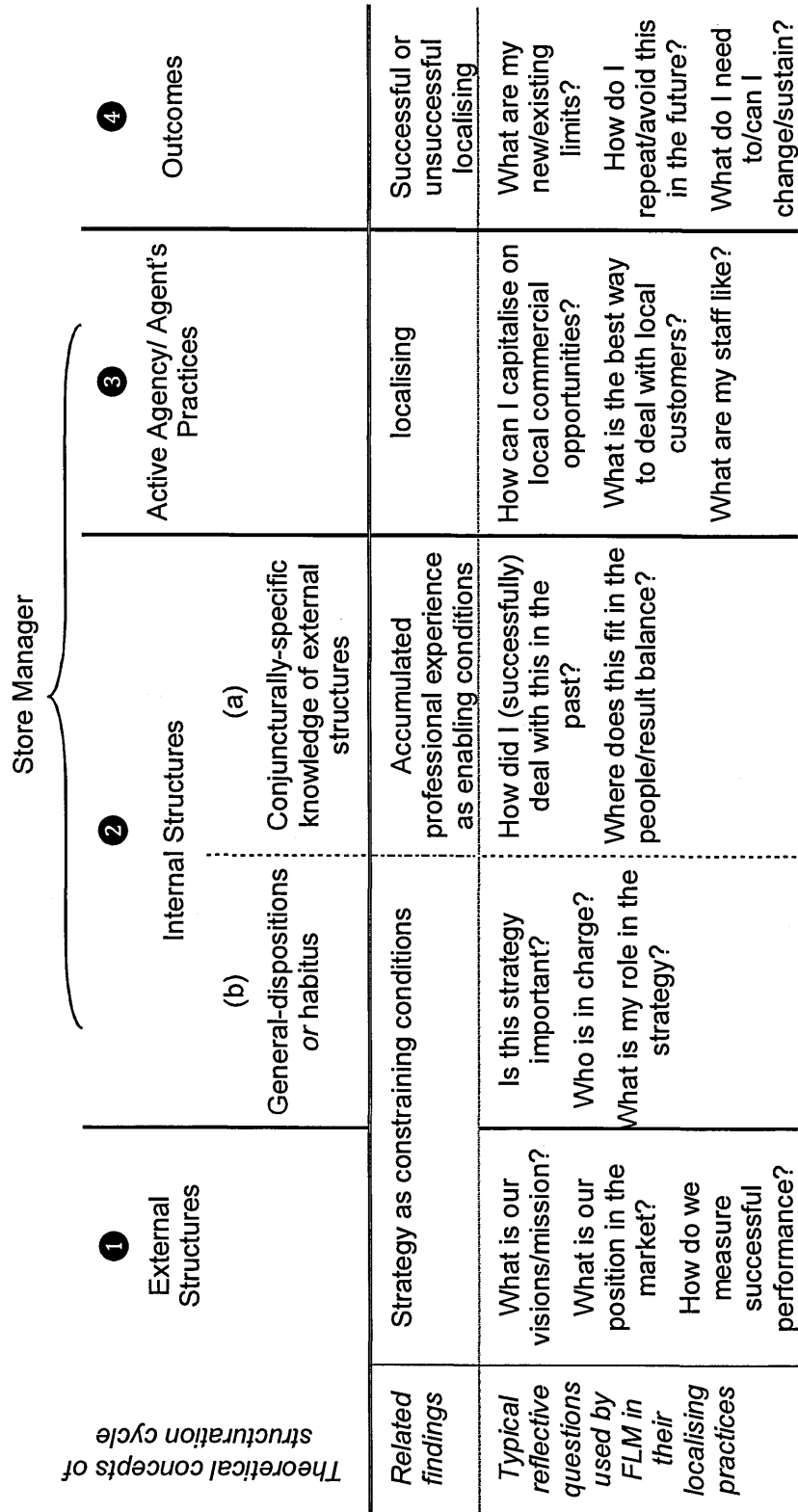
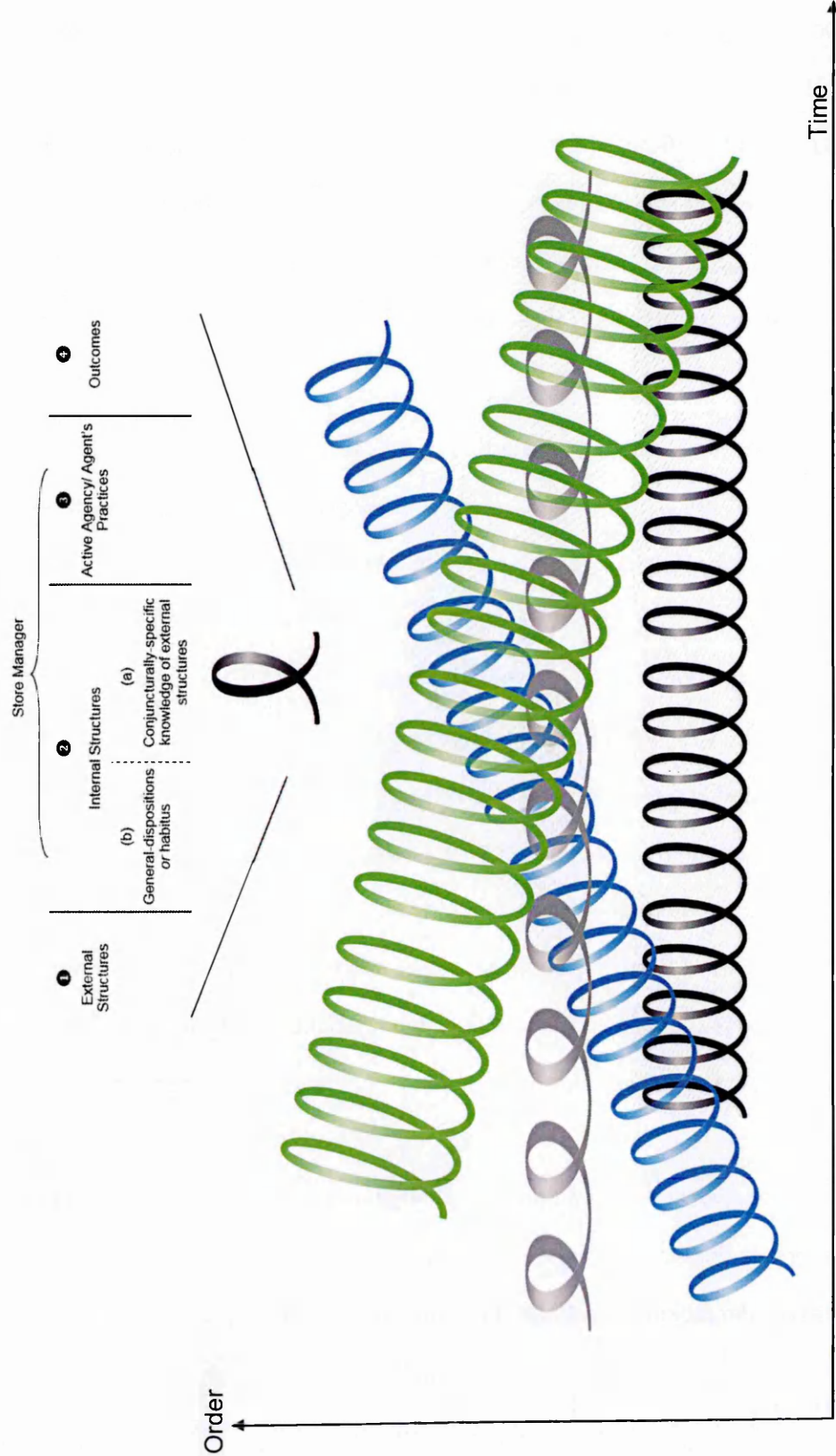


Figure 6-1 continued



The outcomes of the localising praxis are confined and limited to the store level. When Kiran's (FLM) localising was successful, he changed the way things were done in his store and not across the organisation. FLMs are unable to change the pressing conditions (external structures) at the organisational level (Adele, FLM, Adam, FLM). Indeed, FLMs believed their strategic agency stops at the door of their stores. This is despite the feedback proposed by FLMs to the MM, top managers and head office department as FLMs are never told whether or how these suggestions are taken on board at the organisational level (Sana, FLM; Kedar, FLM).

The two examples (narrated in 5.4.4 p.199) were isolated for the convenience of detailing the process of localising as a structuration process. However, each FLM engages in multiple localising practices which take place simultaneously (second part of Figure 6-1 above). FLMs localise according to people and to the commercial environment simultaneously. The outcomes of the localising cycle, whether successful or unsuccessful, become the new internal structures that will be drawn upon in future localising practices. These cycles can be recursive at different pace, some faster than others. Some circumstances might accelerate the process such as moving into new store and dealing with new environment. Equally, some cycles gain more importance, while others decrease. Take for example the change of emphasis that happens every year at the annual conference. Some issues will be prioritised and hence any localising praxis related to these issues will gain importance. Indeed, strategy-realising in the present study appears as a recursive and ongoing process. Hence, the present study supports earlier claims about the recursive nature of strategizing practices and praxis (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007; Spee and

Jarzabkowski, 2011). FLMs are, at any given moment in time, involved in countless structuration cycles, including different strategy-realising praxes.

Previous SaP studies argue that MM's strategic agency is capable of altering shared social structures at the organisation level (Balogun et al., 2005; Mantere, 2005). FLMs strategic agency, by contrast, lacks this capability. Successful localising appears limited to a particular store, and does not apply to the entire organisation. An earlier section in this chapter (6.2.3, p.234) justified this by FLMs lacking the power, the knowledge and the critical distance necessary to alter these pressing conditions. FLMs do not appear as champions of strategy (Mantere, 2005) who actively contribute to strategy-formulation of the entire organisation. Instead, they are primary actors in the strategy-realising process as it unfolds at the peripheries across Optica.

6.4.2 How strategy is enacted in day-to-day work

Findings from the present case study discussed how FLMs day-to-day work aims to manage people and results (5.4.1, p.184). FLMs day-to-day work involves, but is not restricted to, localising. Therefore, some of their activities do not draw upon the organisation's strategy. Strategy is enacted only when the mundane, day-to-day work involves, or is a part of, strategy-realising praxis, hence localising, in Optica.

When the day-to-day work of FLMs is related to localising, FLMs draw on strategy in their conduct as discussed earlier in Figure 6-1 (p. 252). The two examples provided in 5.4.4 (p.199) illustrate how Kiran (FLM) and Stacy (FLM) draw on the concept of strategy in a way that restrained their day-to-day localising practices and praxis.

Furthermore, when FLMs draw upon strategy in their localising practices (therefore draw upon structures in a process of structuration) they actively reproduce this strategy. For example, Hiba (FLM) sees consistent brand image as an essential aspect of Optica's strategy. This consistency dictates that all Optica's stores look and feel the same from the customers' point of view. Therefore, Hiba (FLM) makes sure that her store adheres to the standards set by the centre/top (to maintain uniformity across stores). By doing so, she reproduces the structure she has drawn upon (consistent brand image, an aspect of the concept organisation's strategy). Equally, when localising is successful, FLMs would elaborate or alter the structures for their own store.

A SaP research agenda explicitly invites scholars to investigate the daily and the mundane in the strategizing process (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). A considerable number of SaP empirical research zooms in on how strategists contribute to the formulation of organisational strategy during meetings (Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2008; Samra-Fredericks, 2005) and workshops (Bourque and Johnson, 2008; Hodgkinson et al., 2006; Sminia, 2005). Fewer studies look at how top and middle managers contribute to organisation-level strategy-making during their mundane work (Kaplan, 2008; Rouleau, 2005; Sminia, 2005). This present study offers new insights to understand when and how FLMs enact strategy in their day-to-day work.

Moreover, SaP scholars struggle with ways to distinguish strategic from non-strategic practices (cf. Best and Balogun, 2012; Jarzabkowski, 2005). The present study suggests that SaP researchers should study the conduct of actors first in order to make that decision. When actors draw on the organisation's strategy as a structural context in their conduct, this conduct could be considered

as 'strategic'. Therefore, the present study extends SaP literature by proposing a way to answer the dilemma: is this mundane, day-to-day activity strategically important or not?

6.4.3 Summary and a discussion

The strategy-realising praxis in Optica at the FLM level, localising, can be seen as a process of structuration. This process is composed of multiple, recurrent, overlapping structuration cycles. Organisational strategy constrains localisation and the FLM's professional experience enables it. FLMs draw upon the organisation's strategy in their day-to-day work when it is part of the localising praxis. By doing so, FLMs reproduce or elaborate the organisation's strategy.

Numerous SaP studies have adopted a structuration ontology to theorise strategizing practices and praxis (Balogun and Johnson, 2005; Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007). SaP studies using a structurationist stance rely on structuration-like theories to complete empirical studies (Jarzabkowski, 2008; Mantere, 2008; Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007). As discussed earlier in this research, these studies provide rich accounts of managerial agency (Table 2-4, p.58). SaP research mobilising a structurationist stance tends to portray strategizing as an abstract, overarching structuration process (Jarzabkowski, 2008; Mantere, 2008; Rouleau, 2005). Figure 6-1 (p. 252) offers a novel and comprehensive model of how strategy-realising praxis can be seen as a structuration cycle, involving both structure and agency. Hence, the present case study expands the present SaP literature by offering a more nuanced view on how strategizing (strategy-realisation) unfolds as a structuration process. This allows us to theorise how structural context and strategic agency co-depend and co-emerge at the individual level.

Previous SaP studies embracing a structurationist ontology portrayed strategizing as a bouncing progress between structure and agency (Barley and Tolbert, 1997; Jarzabkowski, 2008; Mantere, 2005; Rouleau, 2005; Sminia, 2009). Such studies produced helpful models, illustrating an oscillating and linear development between structure and agency (see the recurrent arrows in saw-teeth shape in Jarzabkowski's (2008) model in Appendix D, p.286). The present study contributes to current knowledge by embracing structure and agency as an unfolding duality, where they are ontologically distinctive and epistemologically entwined. The interrelationship between structure and agency, therefore, is discerned as it unfolds in concurrent cycles of structuration, which overlaps and influences each other. As visually represented in Figure 6-1, there is no bouncing linearity, only an infinite, recursive and overlapping helical motions. This offers a richer understanding of strategizing as the fluid world unfolds in front of the researcher (Nicolini, 2012, p.2).

6.5 A critical assessment of employing Strong Structuration Theory in SaP research

The popularity of SST has been on the rise in the past five years. Indeed, the theory has been increasingly adopted to complete doctoral research (Krauss, 2010; Murray-Webster, 2014; Sapio, 2012) and to publish academic outputs (Coad and Glyptis, 2014; Greenhalgh et al., 2014; Greenhalgh et al., 2013; Jack and Kholeif, 2008; O'Reilly et al., 2014; Stones, 2014). Three main points arise from reflecting on the experience in mobilising SST to conduct this present SaP research. First, SST offers a solid grounding to undertake empirical research. Second, some concepts in SST afford a nuanced view of strategy and strategizing. Third, the present study exposed two points to develop further in

SST. On the one hand, it fell short of explaining how structures transpose across space. On the other, the methodological framework suggested by Stones (2005) required fine-tuning and development to analyse the empirical data. These points will now be developed in turn.

The literature review of the eight illustrative SaP studies that used ToS (Table 2-5, p.77) revealed that SaP scholars had to rely on a complementary theory (den Hond et al., 2012; Sminia, 2009; Whittington, 2010) to conduct their empirical research (Balogun and Johnson, 2005; Jarzabkowski, 2008; Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007). Strategic management scholars have long criticised Giddens' ToS for its abstraction, and accordingly for the difficulty to mobilise it in empirical research (Heracleous, 2013; Pozzebon and Pinsonneault, 2005; Wright, forthcoming). Supporting ToS with another stance is necessary because, firstly, ToS lacks the necessary detail to carry out empirical research (Gregson, 1989; Pozzebon and Pinsonneault, 2005) and, secondly, Giddens' (1979, 1984) presentation of ToS doesn't explicate the structuration process (Jarzabkowski, 2008). Meanwhile, scholars advocated SST as a sound and a radical development of ToS, responding to its shortcomings and enhancing the operationalization of structurationism in empirical research (Coad and Herbert, 2009; Jack and Kholeif, 2007; Parker, 2006). The present research supports these claims in principle, as it relied solely on SST, proving SST's value for SaP and wider management research. More precisely, this present research benefited from SST recommendations, firstly by considering academic research as an investigation and collecting field data from multiple sources and levels. Second, SST contributed to the analysis of the data by combining both actor's conduct and context analyses within its context (seeing practices within a web of position-

practice relations). Finally, SST aided theorising from the case study; for example regarding strategy as a social structure, strategizing at different levels, and, localisation as a process of structuration. Having said that, SST had to be mobilised in a way that serves the objectives of the present study, and so to take into account the context of the study and the phenomena of interest. SST moves structurationism a step away from abstraction and closer to the ontic, avoiding researchers the need to draw on other theoretical perspectives to theorise from field data. However, mobilising it is a demanding task, requiring sensitivity to the research context. This was clear upon mapping the emerging codes and themes against SST theoretical constructs (4.6.3 (p.134) offered a detailed discussion).

Certain concepts found in SST allow for a nuanced view of strategizing. First, the 'internal structures' notion enabled a flexible conceptualisation of the organisation's strategy in the present study. Internal structures accommodate individuals' opinions, worldviews and experiences in the strategizing process. Consequently, strategy heterogeneity (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Mantere and Vaara, 2008; Steensen, 2014), which advocates having more than one notion of organisation's strategy within the same setting, becomes the norm rather than the exception. In other words, when examining strategizing as the doing of social actors, SaP scholars could lead with the assumption that multiple versions of organisation's strategy, therefore individual conceptualisation of the organisation's strategy, co-exist in an organisation. Second, Stones (2005) offered a way to understand how and when actors are able, or unable, to change organisation-level strategy (conditions discussed in 6.2.1, p.226). These conditions clarify whether an actor has the capacity to participate in formulating the organisation's strategy. Third, placing social actors within a web of position-

practice relations significantly advances how SaP scholars engage and define context. Strategic practices and praxes are always embedded in their context (Balogun et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006). Hence, SaP scholars insist on contextualising the strategizing phenomena of interest (Balogun and Johnson, 2005; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Rouleau, 2005). However, the contextuality of strategy practices and praxes is disturbingly imprecise and scholars have the tendency to use the term hastily (Seidl and Whittington, 2014). SST provides SaP scholars with a framework to study the social contextuality of strategizing. In particular, the context of strategy practices and praxes consists of related external structures, internal structures and position-practice relations. Hence, SST offers SaP scholars the means to systematically and rigorously organise the contextuality and the embeddedness of strategizing. Lastly, taking a meso-level ontological and epistemological position (Stones, 2005) qualifies theorising data beyond dualisms (Farjoun, 2010) and toward dualities. Organisational strategy is inseparable from the conduct of organisational actors, as these actors draw upon, elaborate and reproduce the concept.

Despite its strengths, the present research highlighted two main shortfalls in SST.

The first is the lack of a discussion of how structures transpose over space, a point particularly prominent when investigating strategizing in the peripheries of a multi-unit organisation like Optica. Upon reflecting on this experience, it is believed that SST could overcome this first shortfall by introducing the role of communications in the structuration process, and developing the notion of position-practice relations.

The quadripartite of structuration cycles (Stones, 2005, p.85) explains how social structures travel over time; the outcomes of one structuration cycle become the conditions of the next structuration cycle and other cycles that take place in parallel. However, we are uninformed about how organisation structures travel or/and transposed across space. In the present case study, interactive communication (annual conference, Monthly Regional Meetings) appears to be a vehicle to transpose external structures (strategy) from one level to the other (from centre/top to peripheries). The present case study suggests that communication is the medium through which this transposition takes place. For instance, the strategy statement is communicated in a document, which is maintained and circulated across the organisation even when top management changes (Adele, FLM). Moreover, the content of internal emails could provide early signs of future strategic changes (Sana, FLM).

The notion of position-practice relations deserves further development. What influences these relations? How are these relations sustained, developed and challenged over time? Does the frequency of the interactions between two position-practices affect the importance of the relation? Is the type of interaction (face-to-face, written or formal, for example) more important than the frequency (Elbasha and Avetisyan, 2014)? In Optica, position-practice relations are closely coupled with the organisational structure: FLMs must have working relationships with other employees in order to do their job, but personal networks and socialising seems important for career progression (Zain, FLM). Position-practice relations also seem to be consciously constructed to develop a personal network, which FLMs relied on to carry out their day-to-day work. This network helped to clarify unclear messages from the HO (Adele, FLM), seek guidance when facing

unforeseen circumstances (Stacy, FLM), gossiping (Malek, FLM) and when collaborating to achieve goals (Jack, FLM). Hence, there appears to be multiple 'dimensions' to each position-practice relations which SST could have developed.

The second point where SST had to be developed in the course of the present research is the data analysis process. SST suggests four steps to approach data analysis (Stones, 2005, p.123). While these steps provided a useful broad guidance, they lacked some intricate details. Indeed, the theory fell short of discussing how and when the two types of methodologically bracketing to be employed. As a result, I had to develop the original guiding steps further. The resulting four-dimension data analysis model (Figure 4-2, p.141) can be utilised by SaP scholars to guide empirical data analysis. Through developing these methodological details, this present study contributes to the development of SST and its utility for SaP research.

6.6 Summary of main contributions

The present case study claims four main theoretical contributions to the SaP literature. Despite being less dominant, the study also makes some methodological contributions.

First, it contributes to the evolving SaP research agenda by advancing strategizing as strategy-realising work. Strategy-realising encompasses the enactment (Fenton and Jarzabkowski, 2006, p.632; Maitlis and Lawrence, 2003, p.111), the consumption (Abdallah and Langley, 2014; Suominen and Mantere, 2010) and the embodiment (Rouleau, 2005; Spencer, 2013, p.92; van Maanen, 1991) of the strategy in the organisational life. Strategy-realising is concerned with how the abstract statement of strategy is turned into, and drawn upon in the course of day-to-day praxes and practices of managers. The notion goes beyond

the current SaP literature that concerns itself with strategy-formulation and it advances a new avenue concerned with strategy-realising work. It also allows SaP researchers to study strategy actors at the front lines, beyond middle and top managerial ranks. The present study conveys strategizing of FLMs as a localising process, thus responding to an empirical gap identified earlier in the literature review chapter.

Second, the present study contributes a fresh way to understand the concept of organisational strategy (Mintzberg et al., 1998; Steensen, 2014; Whittington, 2001). Here, strategy is conceptualised as a combination of external and internal pre-dispositional structures. This explains strategy heterogeneity in organisations (Steensen, 2014), it explicates why different actors have different views of the same organisation's strategy. Furthermore, the dual nature (Farjoun, 2010; Whittington, 1992), of being internal and external, allows strategy to be seen as something organisational and individual simultaneously. Organisational strategy is a socially constructed concept that assumes varying degrees of legitimacy and importance across time and space. Strategy is a flexible construct, subject to elaboration and changes by creative social actors.

Third, the current literature on constraining and enabling conditions to strategizing praxis (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Mantere, 2008; Rouleau, 2005) is extended. Previous research concentrates on how strategizing practices have an effect on the conduct of strategists. The present study contributes to an evolving literature which looks at how structural elements influence strategizing praxis (Herepath, 2014). In particular, this present study suggests that the organisation's strategy has a constraining effect on strategizing practices, while previous managerial experience has an enabling effect. Lastly, discussing enabling and

constraining structural conditions contributes to understanding the tension between normativity, where social actors conform to norms, and creativity, where social actors seek to do otherwise (Nicolini, 2012, p.220) in strategy-realising work.

Fourth, the present study conceptualises strategy-realising as a structuration process composed of multiple and overlapping structuration cycles. Figure 6-1 (p.252) offers a model that explicates the unfolding interrelation between structural context and strategic agency at the individual level in the strategizing process, therefore responding to a theoretical gap identified in the current literature. This cyclical view goes beyond the existing simple and linear understanding of strategizing at the organisational level that dominates current literature, and enables a more composite assessment of strategizing. Furthermore, the model provides a way for SaP scholars to appreciate when and how strategy is enacted in strategy-realising practices.

Finally, this study makes modest, yet marked, methodological contributions. By contributing to an emerging body of research that employs SST (Aldous et al., 2014; Coad and Glyptis, 2014; Greenhalgh et al., 2014; Jack and Kholeif, 2007; Stones, 2014), the present study provides an example of how SST can drive empirical SaP investigations of strategizing activities. Further, a new data analysis model is developed (Figure 4-2, p.141) by combining abductive logic with context and conduct analyses methodological bracketing. The developed model can assist researchers in connecting institutional issues with individuals' conduct. This is promising as it encourages scholarly research by means of adopting a balanced view between structural pressures and agential

creativity. Finally, the present case study offers a reflective, critical assessment of SST, highlighting some shortfalls and suggesting ways to develop the theory.

6.7 Chapter summary and a conclusion

This chapter started by addressing three points. The first dealt with how FLMs strategize in a store-based multi-unit organisation. Based on the collected data, FLMs do not contribute directly to formulating strategic directions in Optica. However, they actively participate in the strategy-realising process. FLMs contribute to realisation through localising practices and praxes, that is: the elaboration and/or reproduction of uniform organisation practices in a way that better fits the stores' local environment.

The second point discussed how the structural context enables and constrains FLMs strategizing work in store-based multi-unit organisations. The tension between uniformity pursued by the centre/top and the adaptation sought by FLMs is shaped by structural elements in a given organisation. An organisation's strategy has a unifying role, and consequently constraining effects on FLMs' localising praxis. An organisation's strategy aims to coordinate activities across the store-based, multi-unit organisation to improve the performance of the entire organisation at the expense of local adaptation, persuaded by the FLMs to maximise the store's performance. Professional experience, on the other hand, enables FLMs to localise. Experience is accumulated in the form of tacit knowledge, which is drawn upon in the localising process.

The third point dealt with how FLMs enact the organisation's strategy in their day-to-day work. The organisation's strategy is not enacted in all day-to-day work of FLMs. FLMs draw upon the organisation's strategy when the day-to-day work

is part of the localising process. When drawn upon, an organisation's strategy guides the conduct of FLMS to attain common organisation goals.

By elaborating these three points, the present study was able to illustrate how the structure and agency co-depend and co-emerge in the process of strategizing at the individual level. Indeed, this study theorised the relationship as recursive cycles of structuration, where structural context enables and constrains the strategizing agency of FLMS. Outcomes of these cycles enforce, reiterate or challenge previously established structures. These new structural conditions become the preconditions for future strategizing practices and praxis (Figure 6-1, p. 252).

A critical appraisal of how SST is mobilised to carry out a structurationist-inspired empirical SaP study was also offered. In seeking answers to these questions and by conducting this study, theoretical and methodological contributions to current academic knowledge in the SaP research stream were claimed.

The next concluding chapter offers a summary of the present thesis, highlighting some limitations and proposing future research.

Conclusion

7.1 *Summary of the thesis*

The present research began originally with an aim to understand how Front-Line Managers (FLMs) accomplish strategizing practices in their day-to-day work. A theoretical quest was later developed, and the presented study addressed how the interrelation between structure and agency unfolds at the individual level during strategizing practices and praxis. Using Strong Structuration Theory (SST) as a framing device, the present research developed and answered four research questions, these are:

- What are the main external structures drawn upon by FLMs when strategizing?
- What are the main internal structures drawn upon by FLMs when strategizing?
- How does FLMs' strategic agency manifest in FLMs' day-to-day conduct?
- What are the main position-practice relations within which FLMs operate?

This thesis started by anchoring the research in the strategic management field. Strategic management research encompasses multiple, and sometimes opposing, perspectives (Mintzberg et al., 1998; Whittington, 2001). A recent review by Steensen (2014) revealed five types of strategies in the literature (Figure 2-2, p.35). Steensen (2014) stipulates that these types are not mutually exclusive, resulting in strategy heterogeneity (having multiple strategies) in organisations.

SaP research stream was located within the wider strategic management area and differences between this stream and other contemporary streams in management and organisation research were delineated (2.4.2, p.52). SaP research is interested in studying strategizing, as the nexus between practitioners, praxis and practices (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006). Upon reviewing how SaP empirical research defines strategizing (Table 2-1, p.47), it was concluded that each SaP empirical paper provides a 'context-led definition' of strategizing. This context-led definition is a result of complementing the theoretical definition with the specific context of the study, embedding strategizing practices and praxis within its context. The review also exposed a theoretical gap in addressing the relationship between structure and agency in strategizing.

The framework proposed by Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) was used to identify 12 empirical SaP papers that share similar interests with the present research. Reviewing these 12 papers (Table 2-4, p.58) demonstrated the dominance of a case-study research approach, and the preoccupation with middle and top managers' strategic agency and strategizing activities. Equally, the critical review revealed an empirical gap in the current literature: we are yet to learn how FLMs accomplish strategizing practices in their day-to-day work.

Vaara and Whittington (2012) put forward five key future directions to develop the SaP research agenda. Scrutinising these directions exposes an overwhelming concern with strategy-formulation, which contradicts the earlier, more ambitious definitions of strategizing that advocate for a wider interest in all types of strategy work.

SaP scholars mobilise several practice theoretical lenses to study strategizing (such as: structurationism, Engeström's activity theory, Bourdieu's work, Foucault's work, and the work of Wittgenstein). The use of structurationism as an appropriate theory to study strategizing at the FLMs' level was justified in two different ways: 1) it has an ontological affinity with my own philosophical position; and 2) the duality of structure, a core concept in the theory, allows researchers to investigate the interrelationship between structure and agency while paying balanced attention to each of the two. Giddens' (1979, 1984) Theory of Structuration (ToS) offers the founding principles for structurationism, and some of its main tenets were introduced. Following that, eight exemplar SaP studies identified by Whittington (2010) were critically examined. The examination revealed that ToS has to be combined with other theoretical lenses, these studies were privileging the strategic agency of actors at the expense of a more balanced view between structure and agency (Elbasha and Wright, 2012), and confirmed the theoretical gap addressed by the present study that is; current SaP literature does not discuss the interrelation between structure and agency at the individual level during strategizing practices and praxis.

Optica, the organisation where data collection activities took place, was selected as a favourable context to study FLMs' strategizing for four reasons. First, it is an interesting case, where its flat organisational structure allows us to study FLMs' strategizing as they operate autonomously in the peripheries. Second, a large number of contemporary retail organisations share this multi-unit structure, increasing the potential of transferability of the research outcomes. Third, previous work experience meant that I had a prior knowledge of the specialised optical retail industry and afforded greater opportunities to negotiate

high quality access. Finally, Optica provided an opportunity to study strategizing in the retail sector, which is underrepresented in the SaP literature.

A case study approach was adopted to answer the research questions, allowing for close examination of FLMs' conduct within the same organisation. Twenty-four FLMs and four regional managers were recruited. Primary data was collected through interviews and observations, and secondary data included internal documents and external industry reports. The data covered a period of seven years, with the primary data collection activities taking place over one year. FLMs were interviewed using open questions derived from the research questions, and were observed during their day-to-day work in their respective stores. Collecting data from multiple sources and via multiple data collection methods to inform the present investigation enhances its trustworthiness (Table 4-8, p.158).

Strong Structuration Theory (SST) (Stones, 2005) is advanced as a promising and attractive development of ToS. SST founding principles are presented, clarifying similarities and disparities between ToS and SST. SST offers solid grounds to undertake SaP empirical investigations on its own. However, the present research developed the theory, and utilised it in a way sensitive to the research objective and context.

The analysis proceeded in two cycles, each employing the two types of methodological bracketing: actor's conduct analysis and actor's context analysis. Inspired by a broad guidance from SST, the two methodological bracketing analysis techniques were combined with an abductive logic (Johnson and Duberley, 2000), thus developing the four-dimension analysis model (Figure 4-2, p.141). A summary of the activities taken in each stage of the data analysis was

offered, along with examples of each stage of the data analysis (Table 4-7, p.152). In the analysis process, thematic analysis was used (Braun and Clarke, 2006) employing an emic approach to coding (Silverman, 1993). The resulting 13 themes were organised under four theoretical concepts drawn from SST, these are: external structures, internal structures, agency and outcome, and FLMs in the flow of positions-practices.

The findings chapter answers the four research questions. First, when discussing strategizing, FLMs reported three main types of external structures, these are: strategy as a shared vision/mission, strategy as a brand image and a market share, and strategy as targets linked to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Further, a chronological narrative of the different CEOs in Optica over the past 13 years explains the different approaches adopted by each of the five CEOs. Different CEOs set different priorities to attaining the announced abstract strategy statement, and FLMs' localising work on the shop floor was impacted and limited by these approaches.

Second, FLMs discussed strategy as part of their worldview and general dispositions. FLMs attributed strategy to the person in the position of the CEO, illustrating that different CEOs have different approaches to realising the same strategy statement. Additionally, FLMs reported two levels of strategy in Optica, one at the organisational level that concerns the entire organisation, and a second local level in their store, which is derived from the first. Further, the majority of research participants believed that the organisation's strategy is an important concept to drive the work of different units and employees towards a common goal. Lastly, FLMs' professional experience accounts for conjuncturally-specific internal structures, where it represents their tacit knowledge about 1)

previously tested-and-worked practices, 2) what areas should be prioritised in the day-to-day work, and 3) what is considered a legitimate practice in Optica and the industry.

Third, FLMs reported a long list of mundane, daily tasks that is required to run the store. Their day-to-day work, broadly speaking, aims to manage people (both customers and subordinates) and results (sales, costs and commercial performance). FLMs appear to have no direct role in formulating the organisation's strategy despite the feedback they provide to their superiors. However, FLMs are concerned with realising the strategy, through localising uniform practices and praxes to suit the local setting. This localisation takes into account internal factors such as the size and the social dynamics of the local team, in addition to external factors such as local commercial environment and the local clientele. These two factors mirror the two areas managed by FLMs' day-to-day work. To illustrate this, two comprehensive examples of a successful and an unsuccessful localisation were provided (5.4.4, p.199).

In the fourth and last theoretical construct, the strategizing practices and praxis of FLMs were considered within their wider structural context. The relations between the FLMs and four other main position-practices were explicated in their immediate context, these are: regional managers, fellow FLMs, subordinates and the head office departments. Regional managers do not intervene in the day-to-day work of FLMs, allowing them a great autonomy in managing the stores. The support of the subordinate is important in the day-to-day work of FLMs, and competent subordinates require less supervision, freeing time for FLMs to develop the store's local business. FLMs maintain a support network among their peers, sharing experience and information, especially within their regional

clusters. Finally, the division in identity between the head office staff and the shop floor staff reinforces the tension between the centre/top (seeking uniformity) of Optica and its peripheries (seeking localisation). Discussing these relationships helps situate the strategic agency of FLMs within a web of position-practice relations.

Lastly, interorganisational communications play a crucial part in connecting the different actors, and carrying external structures across space and time. Non-interactive communication channels (emails, printed memos, and a weekly newsletter) are used to inform FLMs about operational details, to affirm information discussed with them earlier during face-to-face meetings, and to relay feedback from the stores to the head office. Interactive communications (regional monthly meetings, annual store managers' conference, and store visits by top managers) are the occasions when the organisation's strategy is discussed. In particular, top managers announce their approach every year in the annual conference and follow up on that during their store visits. The monthly regional meetings offer an opportunity for FLMs to discuss how they turn policies and procedures into actions in their stores.

The present research claims four theoretical contributions. First, it advances strategizing as a strategy-realising work, opening up the SaP agenda to new horizons beyond strategy-formulation and into non-senior ranks. Strategy-realising work is concerned with how the abstract statement of strategy is transposed into, and drawn upon in the course of, day-to-day praxis and practices of managers. Strategy-realising activities are characterised by the localising work done by FLMs at the peripheries in Optica, a multi-unit retail organisation. Second, it offers a fresh gaze at strategy, seeing organisational strategy as a

bundle of internal and external structures. This explicates why different actors within the same organisation attribute different meanings and significations to ostensibly the same organisational strategy. Third, the present case study extends SaP literature on constraining and enabling strategizing conditions. An organisation's strategy, as a bundle of internal and external structures, constrains FLMs from localising. FLMs' professional experience, on the other hand, enables their localising practices and praxis. Fourth, strategy-realising is conceptualised as a structuration process, encompassing multiple and overlapping structuration cycles. The resulting model (Figure 6-1, p.252) details how the organisation's strategy is drawn upon and elaborated in the day-to-day work of FLMs, thus providing a way to understand how structural context and strategic agency co-emerge and co-depend at the individual level in the strategizing process.

In addition to theoretical contributions, two methodological contributions are claimed. First, the present study provides an example of how SST can drive empirical SaP research. It also offers a critical reflection on mobilising SST in the present study. Second, a data analysis model was developed in the course of this research (Figure 4-2, p.141), combining abductive logic with actor's context analysis and actor's conduct analysis methodological bracketing.

7.2 Limitations and future research

The present research adopted a case study approach, which limits the generalizability of the research outcome (Yin, 2003). Findings from the present in-depth case study illustrate the underlying dynamics between structure and agency within a single setting (Eisenhardt, 1989). These findings also clarify the importance of being extremely close to the strategizing phenomenon and familiar with the research settings (Rouleau, 2005). Limited generalizability might be

drawn from these findings (Stake, 1995) in the form of theoretical insights. A future research project that favours positivistic philosophy and, for instance, surveys a large number of FLMs in different organisations would be better suited to provide generalizable outcomes.

One reason for adopting a structuration ontology is the ontological and epistemological affinity it has with the researcher's own philosophical outlook (Pozzebon, 2004, p.250), hence a similar philosophical position, concerning the existence of the social world and how we learn from it, was shared. Additionally, structurationism offers a suitable framework to answer the research questions within the research settings (Whittington, 2010). These two assumptions guided the choice, but they are subject to debate by researchers from other traditions. Other theoretical perspectives may, or may not, have been employed. For example, a strategic change perspective (Balogun and Johnson, 2005) or a sensemaking and sensegiving perspective (Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Rouleau, 2005) could have been suggested, and could have produced different findings. Future studies could examine the same phenomena (strategizing at the FLM level) guided by different research questions and using a different theoretical perspective.

SaP authors have been inviting research into macro societal issues for the past eight years or so (Whittington, 2006, 2012). Although SST offers a framework accommodating the effects of these macro societal structures on FLMs' conduct, the research questions and consequently the data gathered did not directly address these structures. Future studies to explicitly investigate the general-dispositional (internal) structures in the strategizing process have the potential to link broader societal issues such as age, race, national culture or

religion, with organisational practices. This has been recently identified as an important future research direction on the SaP research agenda (Herepath, 2014; Seidl and Whittington, 2014; Suddaby et al., 2013; Vaara and Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2012).

The case study examined how FLMS strategize by interviewing and observing these actors. Methodologically speaking, vigilance has been taken through collecting data from various actors at different levels (FLMs and MMs), and from different resources (internal documents and external reports). However, the study gave voice to the FLMS, privileging their point of view. Future research could look at the strategy-realising phenomenon from, for example, the top managers' point of view.

The study was not designed to assess the relation between the freedom to localise and the performance of the store, neither the relation between the ability to localise and the attainment of strategic targets. A future study with a larger sample of cases in a longitudinal study with performance data could shed light on these issues.

Time and space are important elements of social life (Giddens, 1984), yet, these issues receive little attention in strategic management research. The present study highlighted the importance of these, without going into detail about them. SaP could be interested in how temporal/spatial aspects of organisational life influence strategizing. For example, how does the order of strategizing practices influence the outcomes, and how does the geographical spread of organisations affect their strategizing processes? With the materiality theme gathering pace in the field (see special issue in the *British Journal of Management*, January 2015), questions about spatial arrangements seem timely.

7.3 *Implications for practice*

While this case study took place in Optica, findings might also be applicable to other multi-unit retail organisations. Based on findings from the present research, top managers can include or exclude FLMs from the strategy-realising process by establishing more or less constraints on their localising practices. If agility is more important, then looser constraints will set the FLMs free to adapt to the local environment and swiftly seize local opportunities. If centralisation and standardisation is desired, then stricter limits will make the stores behave in uniform way.

Three reasons are proposed to explain why FLMs are unable to participate in formulating the organisation's strategy. In particular, they do not have adequate power, the necessary knowledge to make a decision across the entire organisation, or the critical distance from the day-to-day operational details. In most multi-unit organisation, FLMs usually follow an in-house training program that aims to increase their managerial capacity and boost their skills. Such a training program could explicitly address these three points as part of the overall skill development and career progression. For instance, the program could include information about the entire organisation in its different locations and its functions.

Lastly, the research findings suggest that gaining experience through managing different stores is important for FLMs to be active participants in strategy-realisation. This could feed into an organised rotation program, where store managers develop their managerial skills by participating in such a program.

This is likely to stimulate fresh ideas and be a source of motivation for those managers who choose to participate.

7.4 *Final reflections*

As stated earlier in this thesis, becoming a qualitative researcher does not come by reading, but by doing and getting one's hands dirty. I quickly developed the habit of collecting too much data and keeping in contact with the research participants after the data collection in case the need arose for clarification from them. This research was satisfying at a personal level because I was once in the FLM position, and frequently wondered whether strategy is important and how it is perhaps enacted on the shop floor. It was therefore an emotional learning rather than a distanced, objective one. The research process also educated me about adopting different postures and using diverse vocabularies according to the audience.

Doing research in one's own organisation was an interesting exercise. On the one hand, prior knowledge of the research setting and the jargon used was tremendously helpful, so it having prior contacts and being able to negotiate access. On the other, it entailed a steep learning curve about being reflexive research and how one could, or could not, account for her/his own interpretation and knowledge before setting off to conduct an academic research. During the process, I became more aware of my own thinking and predispositions, and how it affected my choice of the empirical research questions. My passion for the industry and the profession and for front-line work seems to continue as I project my future academic research career.

What was indeed frustrating is the slow rate at which academia validates and produces knowledge. By the time data was analysed, Optica had replaced its strategy statement with a new 'values' statement. Through keeping contact with the research participants, they were very surprised that academic research takes such a long time to complete. When explained that it is a rigorous process involving peer-validation and making sure that trustworthiness criteria are met, one middle manager questioned the efficiency of such process. As such, my only comfort lies in the present research being the first and, hopefully, future projects will be completed faster.

Upon embarking on this 'journey', senior colleagues talked about the challenges, the steep learning curve and the importance of self-motivation. The researcher does not recall, however, anyone talking about the emotions involved in the PhD journey. Frustration, joy of discovery, disappointment, fear, anxiety, happiness, boredom, anger, satisfaction, changes in one's identity, and questioning the purpose of the exercise itself, are only few of the many emotions that had come and gone throughout the process. This was described this to one colleague as 'riding a really fast rollercoaster, without a clear sense of when this ride will end'. Luckily, we can often rely on the support of friends, family, supervisors and colleagues.

The end

Appendixes

Appendix A - Research information sheet and consent form

Tamim Elbasha - Research Information Sheet



Strategy at the organisational peripheries; a case study of first-line managers strategizing at a high street retailer in the UK.

Introduction:

Modern high street retailers are geographically dispersed organisations, with one headquarters and many outlets. The responsibility for delivering the corporate strategy is pushed down the hierarchy to organisational frontiers. I am interested in strategy as a social practice, accomplished collectively by organisational members at all levels. Strategy is something that people do together.

Study aims:

This project aims to search for any links between the daily, routinely activities performed by first-line management and the overall organisational strategy. The outcomes will improve our understanding of how front line, daily managerial practices can influence long-term goals. This leads to designing better communication channels, better training programs and better recruiting procedures of retail managers.

What do I need to do?

I would like to spend few days with you in your store (2-4 times over a period of 6-8 months) which will help me to understand your daily routine. I would also like to follow that day with a short interview at your convenient. Through the interview, I will be able to ask your opinion and verify my understanding of your routines. The interview will last for 30-60 minutes and, with your prior permission, I wish to record the interview. I will ask open-ended questions during the interview to which there is no right or wrong answers: I would like to know your opinion on how your daily activities may affect the company's strategy.

Additionally, I would like also to attend the regional monthly meetings over a period of 6-12 months. These meetings are important because you share and communicate strategic issues with the regional manager and the rest of the store managers (discussing targets, training, marketing companies, internal procedures, regional changes, and so on). With your permission, I wish to use a visual-audio recorder to record the meetings. The video will help me to understand the physical environment while you are in the meetings (e.g. sitting in round tables or facing the presentation, clustered in teams) and how you use some tools during the meeting (e.g. presentations, slides whiteboards).

What will happen to the data I collect?

Your participation is very valuable and your input will be kept confidential at all times. The activities will be conducted under the Open University strict ethical code of practice, which means that the digital recordings and any notes will be stored on a secure server, or otherwise in encrypted form with password protection.

The data will not contain any personal data (such as names and contact details) and all information will be anonymised. The information provided may be used for educational or/and research purposes, including publications in *academic* journals. The data may be available to other researchers and an examination panel in order to verify my findings and/or help me to make sense of them.

A summary of the findings will also be made available to you and the company in a form of a short report. The report will not contain any information that can lead to the identification of the participants.

Your consent:

While most people find it interesting to be part of a business research, your participation is voluntary and you may ask to stop the recording or choose not to answer any question during the interview. You may also ask me to pause or stop at any point while I am spending time with you. Finally, your consent can be withdrawn up until the beginning of September 2011, when I start to analyse the data, by contacting me in writing using the details at the end of this page. If you wish to withdraw your consent, any information that you have provided will be destroyed.

More information:

This study is funded by the Open University Business School. If you have any concerns about this research or if you wish to discuss it in confidence, you can contact me or my supervisor Dr Alex Wright by email at: a.d.wright@open.ac.uk or via telephone 01908 655 878.

Thank you for your time and support. You can contact me using the following details:

Tamim Elbasha

*The Open University Business School
Walton Hall • Milton Keynes • MK7 6AA*

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Strategy at the organisational peripheries; a case study of first-line managers strategizing at a high street retailer in the UK.

Thank you for considering taking part in this project, which aims to improve our understanding of how front line, daily managerial activities can influence long-term goals. It is a requirement to obtain consent from all participants in the project.

Consent to participate in the research project:

I have read and understood the information sheet related to this project. I understand that by signing this document I am giving my consent to participate in the study. I am also aware that I can withdraw this consent within two weeks.

Please tick the appropriate boxes.

- ☐ Please tick this box to confirm that you are happy to meet me for an interview, and (if applicable) for me to spend a day with you in your store.
- ☐ Please tick this box to confirm your consent to the audio recording of the interview.
- ☐ Please tick this box if you are happy for me to attend the regional monthly meetings.
- ☐ Please tick this box to confirm your consent to the audio-visual recording of the monthly meetings.

I _____, agree to take part in the research outlined above.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Tamim Elbasha
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Appendix B - Ethical Approval

ELBASHA Tamim

From: D.Banks
Sent: 21 July 2011 12:34
To: T.Elbash; A.D.Wright; M.Meadows
Cc: Research-REC-Review; Research-Ethics; D.Banks
Subject: HREC/11/#968/1

From: D.Banks [mailto:d.banks@open.ac.uk]
Sent: 30 June 2011 12:46
To: T.Elbash; A.D.Wright; M.Meadows
Cc: Research-Ethics; 'Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk'; D.Banks
Subject: #968 - Approval

From: Dr Duncan Banks
Chair, The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee
Email: d.banks@open.ac.uk
Extension: 59198
To: Tamim Elbasha, OUBS.
Subject: 'Store manager's strategizing in retail.'
Ref: HREC/11/#968/1
Red form
Submitted: 8 July 2011
Date: 21 July 2011

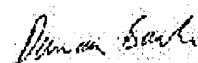
Memorandum

This memorandum is to confirm that you have satisfactorily addressed each of the points raised by the ethics review panel and can commence your research.

Please forward any communications regarding this approval to Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk.

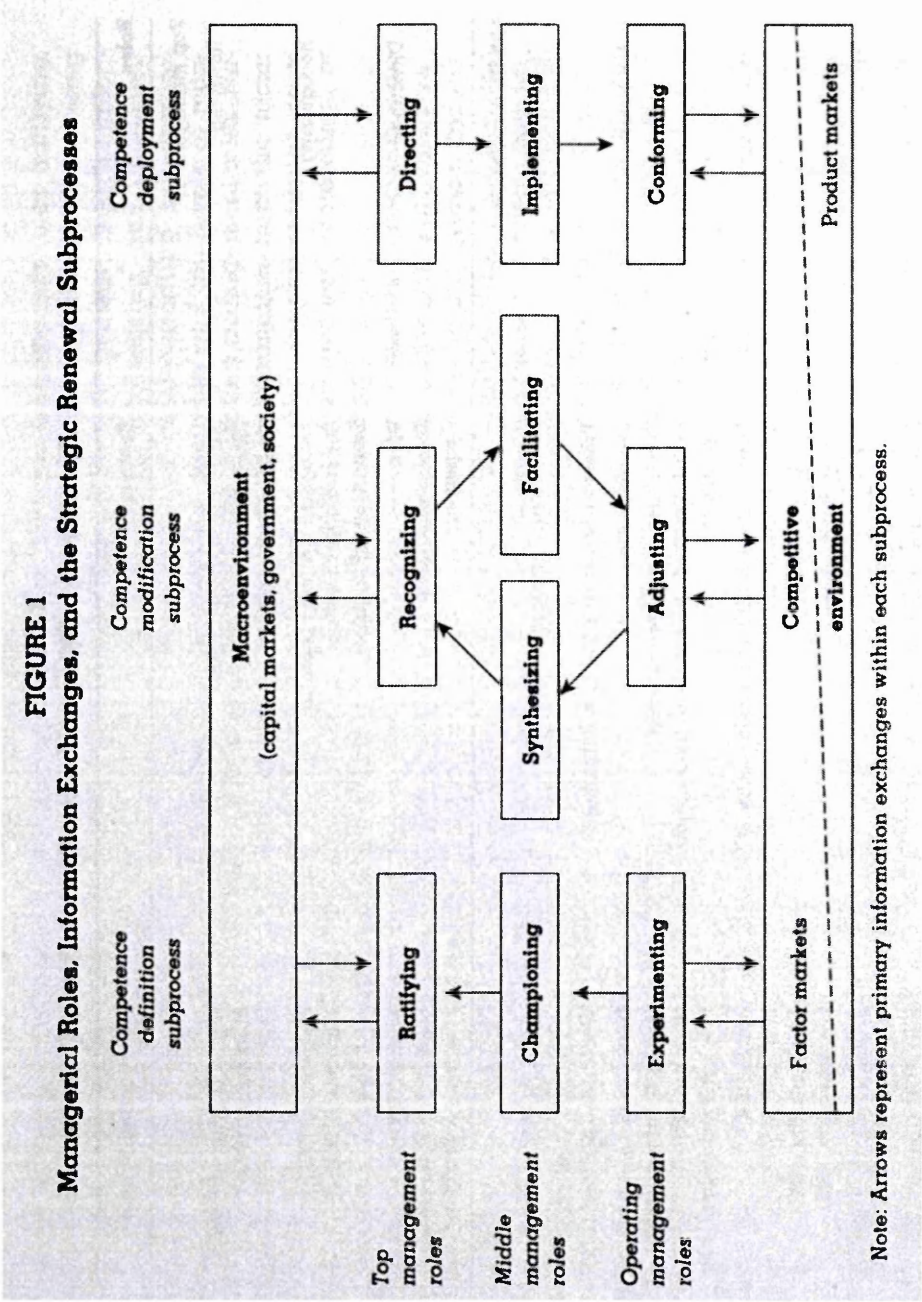
At the conclusion of your project, by the date that you stated in your application, the Committee would like to receive a summary report on the progress of this project, any ethical issues that have arisen and how they have been dealt with.

Regards,

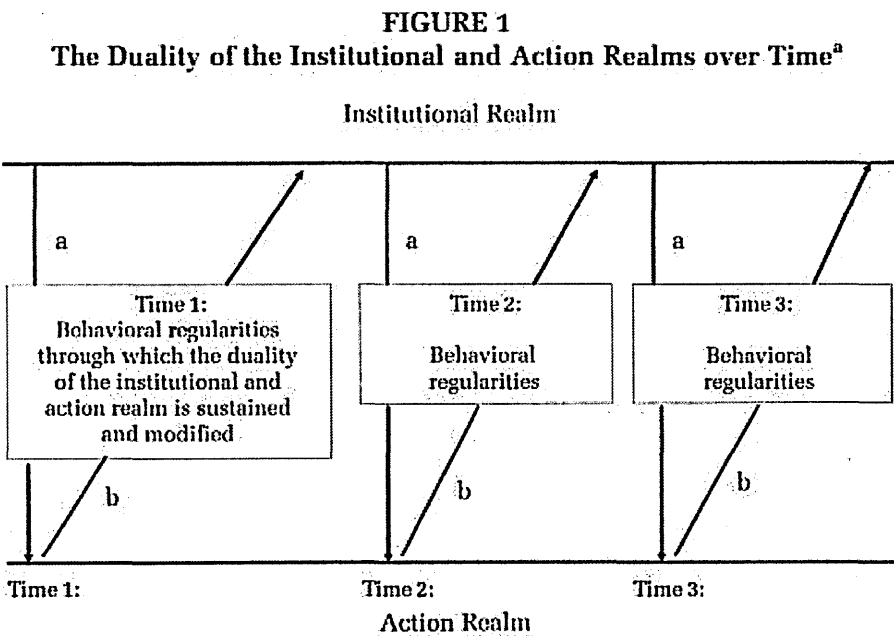


Duncan Banks
Chair OU HREC

Appendix C - Managerial roles across the organisation (Floyd and lane, 2000, p.160)



Appendix D - Strategizing as a movement between the institutional and the action realms (Jarzabkowski, 2008, p.624)



Key: Arrow a: Institutional influences are instantiated in the action realm within the behavioral regularities that people exhibit in their day-to-day actions.
Arrow b: Changes in the action realm modify behavioral regularities, which are then distanced from any individual actor or action as shifts in institutions.

^a This model draws primarily from Barley and Tolbert's (1997: 101) framework (see also Orlikowski 1996; Pozzehon & Pinsonneault, 2005). Barley and Tolbert used the term "scripts" but explicitly noted that these are not cognitive scripts but "behavioral regularities," which are "observable, recurrent activities and patterns of interaction characteristic of a particular setting" (1997: 98). The term "behavioral regularities" is used here to avoid confusion with the term "script."

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